

***The Lessons of Mix***

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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### **Abstract**

In the field of speech pathology, professionals use tools such as comic books to help teach children in therapy. Professionals also act as advocates for people with communication disorders, as liaisons between those directly affected by these disorders and those that are not. My thesis aims to serve as both a tool for professionals to use in therapy as well as one to raise awareness of communication disorders. Following is the comic I have written and illustrated along with my meta-analysis rationalizing creative decisions and character design in relation to each character's communication disorders or lack thereof.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Teresa McClain for not only sharing her professional experience and wisdom with me, but also for supporting me throughout this endeavor. I have called her a professor, clinic advisor, and thesis advisor, but I am most proud to call her my mentor. I would like to dedicate this comic to my mother. Her belief in me was unshaking, giving me the faith to tackle the challenge that was this comic.



### Process Analysis

My Honors thesis, a graphic novel titled *The Lessons of Mix*, was a challenging endeavor. Writing and illustrating a graphic novel involves different storytelling strategies and nuances not found in film or literature. Rather, the medium of graphic novels, or comic books, combines elements of both film and literature to create a unique experience. Graphic novels have shown promise in helping children with communication disorders enhance their reading and language skills (Brenna, 2013). I chose the medium of graphic novels to both serve as a creative outlet as well as to craft a tool to entertain and teach children with or without communication disorders, as well as young adults, about communication disorders. In this meta-analysis, I will discuss my creative approach as well as challenges I faced as an amateur writer and illustrator. I will also discuss how I showcased certain elements of disorders such as specific language impairment (SLI) and Autism spectrum disorder. Though there is still much debate in the industry as to the difference between “graphic novel” and “comic books” or “comics.” Throughout this essay I will use all those terms interchangeably. Though my thesis is mostly creative in nature, I did work with a professional speech-language pathologist, Teresa McClain, to learn about communication disorders and their presentations. Consequently, I do not have references for my understanding of these disorders as this knowledge comes from a combination of past research, SPAA classes, and consultation with Professor McClain. I recommend reading the comic before reading this meta-analysis, as major plot spoilers are present within.

When discussing my creative process, I must first mention that I am not a trained artist. I have made a short comic as a part of a study abroad class I took while in Paris. As a part of the class, we visited many of Paris’s art museums and read a multitude of comics in French. Additionally, I love comics and read them regularly. My style, consequently, is a mash-up of many different sources and styles. My character designs were mostly the result of doodles in the margins of my class notes, with minimal inspiration taken from comics like *Naruto* and *Scott Pilgrim*. *Naruto* is a Japanese manga with a more

realistic art style; however, character proportions will drastically change for comedic effect or to showcase a character's strong emotions. *Scott Pilgrim*, by contrast, is a very stylized comic from North America, with characters having simplified and exaggerated proportions that generally remain consistent. Consequently, my characters are very stylized with exaggerated proportions, which is why their heads are much bigger than their bodies. Additionally, characters will sometimes change proportions for comedic effect or to exemplify their emotions.

Regarding storytelling, again, I do not have any formal training. I have read many comics, and I feel most of my pacing and humor in my story is taken from *Scott Pilgrim*. *Scott Pilgrim* is a series that is meant to be funny and entertaining, but simultaneously presents characters that feel human and have real emotional issues they must tackle. In *Scott Pilgrim*, there is a strong underlying theme of growing up; Scott, the main character, starts the series as a young 21-year-old just enjoying life. Throughout the series, Scott is forced to mature by communicating his emotions instead of ignoring them, by learning to be independent rather than relying on others, and by learning to pick his battles. Though these emotional events are different for everyone, the author, Bryan Lee O'Malley, presents them in a way that allows readers to connect with the characters and feel what they are feeling. The tone in *Scott Pilgrim* fluctuates between lighthearted humor and somber emotional events naturally, and I tried to capture the same 'flow' in my own comic. *The Lessons of Mix* is mostly meant to be humorous and entertaining, but it simultaneously presents an emotional issue that many people with communication disorders face: accepting their disorder. Many people with communication disorders feel unintelligent because they struggle to communicate. My comic takes from the storytelling style of O'Malley, presenting and recognizing real emotional issues without feeling completely somber. I cannot say I have mastered storytelling as O'Malley has, but much of my artistic inspiration, predominantly in storytelling, came from O'Malley and *Scott Pilgrim*.



To discuss how I addressed communication disorders in my comic, I must discuss the characters. First, I will discuss Mix, the main character. Mix has SLI. The cause of SLI is unknown and it can present differently in every case. In Mix's case, the presentation involves severe decoding issues. Basically, Mix has trouble deciphering words when reading, as the letters jumble together, making "for" look like "from," for example. When reading, Mix uses his energy to decode but does not comprehend what he reads because his focus was on decoding the words. In the story, reading is equated to magic; this is why everyone can cast magic except Mix. Mix also has some minor issues with expressive language, or the language we produce to communicate. This is different than receptive language, which is the language we take in from outside sources. Mix has great receptive language, excluding reading, and is a very bright child. However, his expressive language, specifically his morphology (using correct endings on words, such as past tense and plural) and syntax (order of words in sentences), leads to misunderstandings. However, none of this is revealed until the end of the story in the final chapter, where the setting shifts from a magical kingdom to reality. It is also revealed that Mix is the author of the preceding story, and he explains that the story was about him accepting his disorder.

Much of the dialogue between characters was chosen to foreshadow the twist. For example, whenever Icky says he cannot understand Mix, it is because Mix *thinks* he is communicating effectively but is not. Generally, children with SLI communicate in shorter sentences in order to be understood more easily. Whenever Mix is not understood, he is usually speaking in longer monologues. Mix's dad, on the other hand, can understand Mix relatively well because he has lived with the disorder. He has grown accustomed to the way Mix speaks, whereas Icky recently met Mix and is not used to his way of speaking.

Throughout the story, Mix is hounded by his shadow. Mix's shadow is a representation of his unwillingness to accept his disorder. Mix is a very head-strong person. He is confident and bold, sometimes to a fault. He knows he is intelligent, yet decides to use his intelligence and boldness to help

others, which is why he comes to Icky's aid early in the story. He refuses to accept his disorder because he feels that by accepting it, he's accepting that he's dumb, and therefore giving up. Many people, both young and old, do not want to accept that they have a communication disorder. Many people also feel that having a communication disorder means they are unintelligent. I tried to exemplify this aspect of Mix's character to show that his feelings are real but not entirely well-founded. Mix eventually accepts his SLI. He has a yearning to be perfect, but he realizes that perfection is just an ideal. He still likes who he is, however, flaws and all. At the climax, just before he is crushed by his shadow, he accepts himself, along with his disorder, and feels happier because of it. Through Mix's acceptance of himself, I wanted to show children who have communication disorders that they are not stupid or worthless, as they may lead themselves to believe. Rather, they are who they are, and that is a wonderful person to be!

Along with confronting what each person with a communication disorder may be feeling, I wanted to address what the families of people with communication disorders may be feeling. I kept this idea in mind when crafting Mix's dad, simply named Dad. Dad embodies many of the emotions parents usually feel when learning their child has a communication disorder: disbelief, anger, guilt, confusion, and so on. Again, I carefully chose Dad's dialogue to parallel real conversations parents may have about communication disorders. For example, when Dad is meeting with the Dark Master, later revealed as the speech-language pathologist (SLP), their conversation can easily be shifted in context to a conversation between a parent and an SLP. Parents understandably think that communication disorders can be "cured." It is never that simple, however. Dad is angry at the Dark Master for refusing to get rid of the shadow, or Mix's SLI. However, the Dark Master says the SLI is a part of Mix that can't just be wiped away, paralleling what many SLPs are forced to explain to the parents of children with communication disorders.

Later in the story, Dad expresses that he should've done more to help Mix, but Mix explains that his disorder is not anyone's fault. Again, I crafted the dialogue to parallel what parents usually feel – that



their child's communication disorder is somehow their fault and they should have done more to prevent it. In actuality, SLI usually has nothing to do with the parents. As previously mentioned, the cause of SLI is unknown, but Dad still feels he could have prevented it.

With the character of Dad, I am speaking directly to the parents of children with communication disorders. My hope is this story can be used as a therapy tool. As such, many parents would read it with their children. As they read, I wanted to make it clear that their emotions are normal and okay. However, they need to understand that they are not to blame. As long as they are supportive and loving toward their child, they are succeeding as parents. Therefore, I crafted Dad as being sometimes doubtful in himself but always loving towards Mix.

Closely connected to Dad is the SLP, first introduced as the Dark Master. In many cases, SLPs are seen as the "bad guys." Parents usually have some anger and confusion when first learning their child has a communication disorder, anger which is usually directed at the SLP. Children with communication disorders are usually aware of their disorder, and when SLPs try to force them to do things they know they are bad at, they usually have negative emotions tied to the SLP. Of course, these emotions are not always present and if they are, they are usually only at the beginning. In most dialogues the Dark Master is involved in, his dialogue is basically what an SLP would say regarding a child and their communication disorder. Contextually, though, his dialogue sounds sinister, as the story is told through Mix's point of view and he mistakenly believes the SLP is evil. In actuality, he only wants to help Mix accept his disorder.

With the SLP, I wanted to express that we, as professionals, are dedicated to helping people with communication disorders, but the motivation must come from the individual. SLPs need the client to understand and accept their disorder so that everyone can move forward in treating the disorder. However, if either the client or their family is unwilling to accept the disorder, the SLP cannot do their

job. With the SLP, or the Dark Master, I wanted to acknowledge that many people see SLPs as the “enemy” but we want to help those who want to be helped.

Regarding Mix’s friends, I tried to choose their disorders (or lack thereof) carefully. Percy, for example, has mild Autism because many students have peers with Autism spectrum disorders. Autism is a common communication disorder that many children will see; however, it does not affect communication in an easily quantifiable manner as most disorders do. For example, Mix’s reading deficits associated with his SLI can be measured by his comprehension of a passage or the speed at which he reads a given passage. Percy, on the other hand, has pragmatic deficits (issues understanding social cues and reacting appropriately), which are harder to recognize and quantify. Percy can learn efficiently and is very bright, but he does not read social cues or facial expressions very well. This is why Percy cannot understand why Mix is upset after Percy says, “What DUNCE can’t use magic?” Percy was not able to read Mix’s emotions through his facial expressions, and therefore did not understand that Mix was angry about Percy’s comments. This is also why Percy is offended by Icky calling him insensitive; many people with mild Autism are aware of their deficits. Many believe people with Autism don’t understand emotion, which is untrue. People with mild Autism can *understand* other people’s emotions, they just have trouble *reading* others’ emotions. I tried to make this distinction clear; Percy usually understands why people are upset once he’s told but cannot usually figure it out on his own.

Percy also struggles with turn-taking during conversations. In normal conversation between two people, each person takes a chance to reflect on what the other participant said and add their own input, which is followed by the other participant doing the same. This volley of conversation continues until the conversation switches topics or naturally ends, at which point the individuals part ways. Percy does not understand this concept so he will usually continue talking as much as he wants about whatever he wants to, a characteristic which is common among people with Autism.



Finally, Percy has a fixation on flowers. Admittedly, this is not a common fixation among people with Autism and was mostly chosen to fit the narrative. However, the fact that Percy has a fixation stems from the fact that many people with Autism fixate on specific areas of interest, such as locomotives or marine animals. I chose to have Percy fixate on flowers to both exemplify his deficits in turn-taking as well as showcase another common characteristic of people with Autism.

Percy is purposefully presented as slightly smug at first. Percy's cockiness partially comes from the fact that many times, people perceive individuals with Autism as stuck-up because of their impaired pragmatic abilities. In Percy's case, he knew that people saw him this way, so he embraced it as a defense mechanism. A flashback in the middle of the story alludes to the fact that Percy is jealous of Mix's ability to be social, a skill which he lacks. At the end of the story, it is revealed that Percy struggles to make friends because of his disorder. Percy felt very isolated and sad because he could not make friends as easily as other kids. I exemplified his emotional reaction to his situation because it is a common misconception that people with Autism do not or rarely feel emotions. This is untrue; people with Autism can *feel* emotions, but as previously mentioned, they struggled to *pick up on others'* emotions.

With Percy's character, I wanted to call attention to a common disorder found in children. I tried to showcase Percy's deficits while explaining that he is not dumb or mean; he is a very smart, confident, and caring friend. He simply struggles to understand others' feelings, but it does not mean he does not care about others. Mix and Icky accept Percy, and after learning about his Autism, they try to help him compensate for his deficits. Percy is worthy of having friends, just like anyone else with Autism.

The last character to discuss is Icky. Again, I chose his disorder carefully, in that I chose to not give him a disorder. Though Icky is a normal kid with no disorders, he is arguably the least confident character in my story. He has some self-doubt even though he is intelligent and can cast magic. I designed Icky this way so that, even though he does not have deficits, he sees Percy and Mix as role

models. Arguably, most would think that Percy and Mix would look up to Icky because he is pragmatically normal and can read normally. However, I wanted to have a role-reversal to show that even though these characters have disorders, they still have much to teach others. From adventuring with Mix, Icky learns how to be brave and to tackle his fears. Icky is constantly afraid of what is to come, but he never thinks of quitting. Though not explicitly stated in the story, Icky perseveres because he is inspired by Mix's confidence despite his own shortcomings.

Icky is aware Mix's deficits throughout the story, though this is only alluded to and not stated. When Icky eyes Mix after Mix fails to cast magic (i.e. read), Icky understands that Mix has some sort of disorder. However, Icky simply accepts the fact and moves on. Icky never sees Mix as lower than him and he never pities Mix. Icky is not friends with Mix because he feels bad for him, but rather because he looks up to Mix. Icky is still understanding of Mix's emotions, though, as he tried to comfort Mix before the shadow arrives for the final battle. Icky understands that Mix does not want to accept his disorder, but he does not want to force him to accept it.

Icky being accepting of Mix's disorder is showing that kids with and without disorders really are not that different and can still be friends with one another. I wanted to show that, disorder or not, everyone can learn something from everyone else, but you can only learn from each other by acknowledging and accepting each other's differences.

My Honors thesis proved to be much more work than I initially thought. I was forced to cut down the story, which resulted in the exclusion of another location (a village) and two characters, one which would have an articulation issue and another that had an undetermined communication disorder. However, I feel these cuts ultimately resulted in a story that is tighter in focus while still being accessible to my target audience. I hope one day, after I earn my Master's degree and possibly a PhD, I will be able to revisit this project. I feel my comic has potential, but requires refinement, preferably by those trained in illustration and storytelling. In revisiting this project, I hope to create a proven therapy tool to help



children with communication disorders. As of now, though, I am proud of my comic and I hope it inspires professionals in the field of speech-pathology to create works that entertain audiences, help children enhance their language skills, and raises awareness and acceptance of communication disorders.

**Works Cited**

Brenna, Beverley. "How Graphic Novels Support Reading Comprehension Strategy Development in Children." *Literacy*, vol. 47, no. 2, July 2013, pp. 88-94. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1111/j.1741-4369.2011.00655.x.

# THE LESSONS OF MOIX

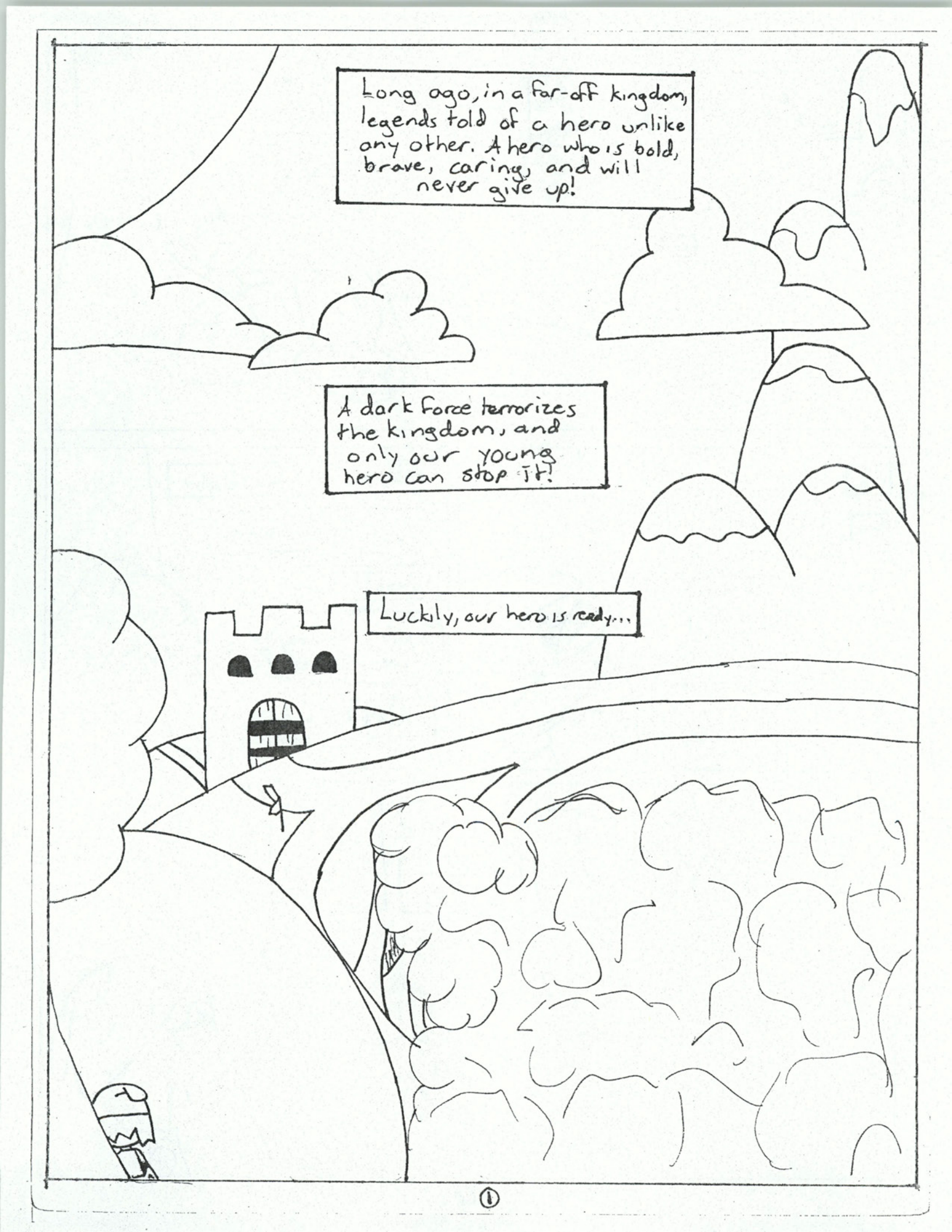


THE EYE

XCM







Long ago, in a far-off kingdom,  
legends told of a hero unlike  
any other. A hero who is bold,  
brave, caring, and will  
never give up!

A dark force terrorizes  
the kingdom, and  
only our young  
hero can stop it!

Luckily, our hero is ready...



Er... or at least he will be,  
right after his mid-day nap.

Zzzzz



Uh.

Hey.

We need to get this  
show on the road.

Can't you  
see that  
I'm sleeping?

Well, yes, I know, but-

Five more minutes.

What?!

Give me five  
more minutes.

I don't think-

FWIP



UGH

FINE.  
I'll get up.

Thank you.





Right! So! As I  
was saying! Our  
young hero here  
is named Mix and-



**HELP!**

Sorry,  
narrator-guy,  
but this will  
have to wait!

Someone  
needs help!

And it's  
coming from  
the forest!

**HELP ME!**

Hop

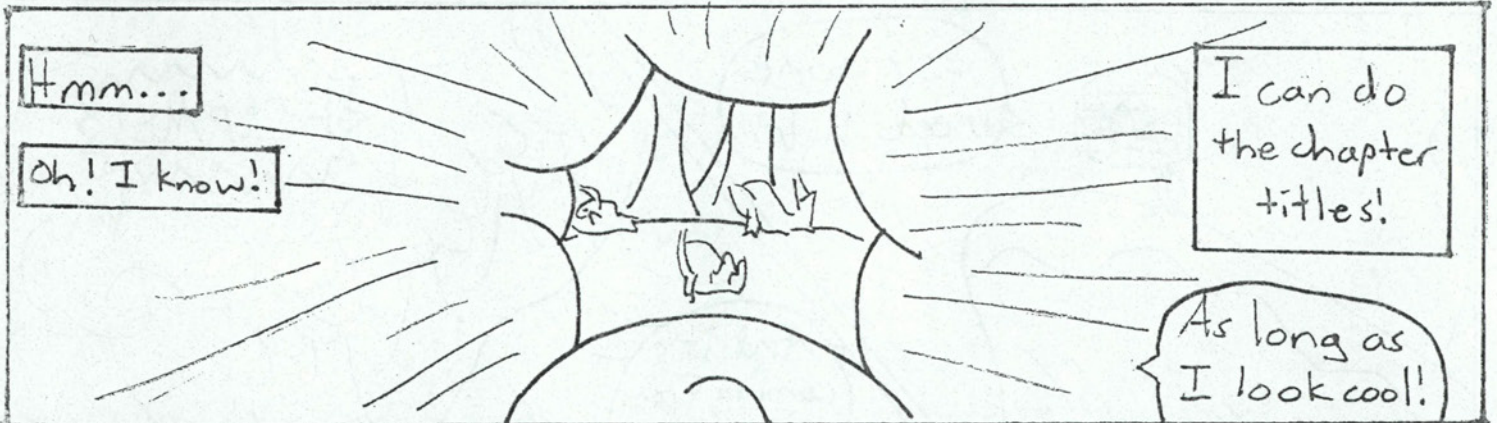
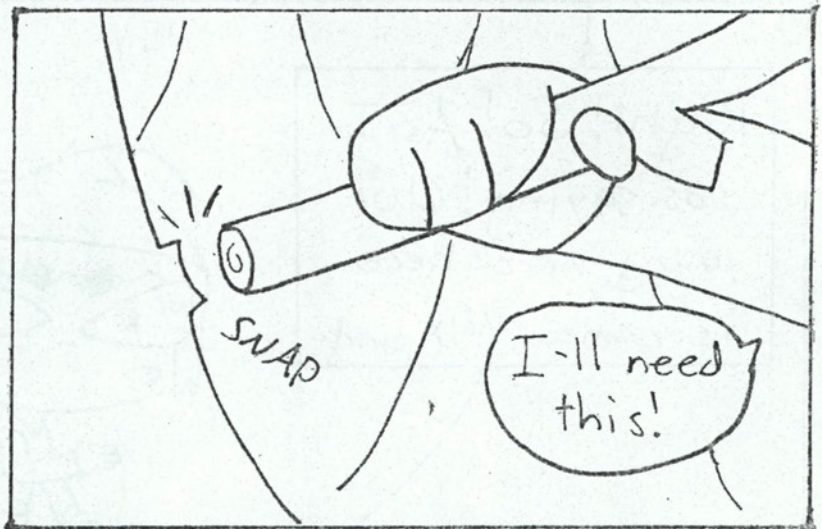
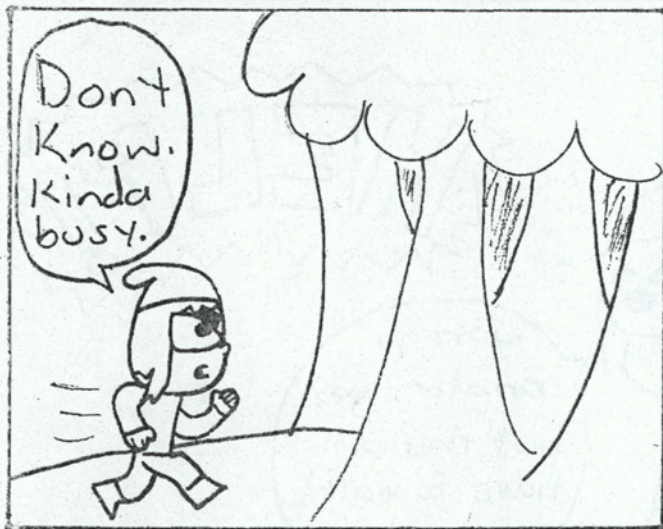


**SLIDE**

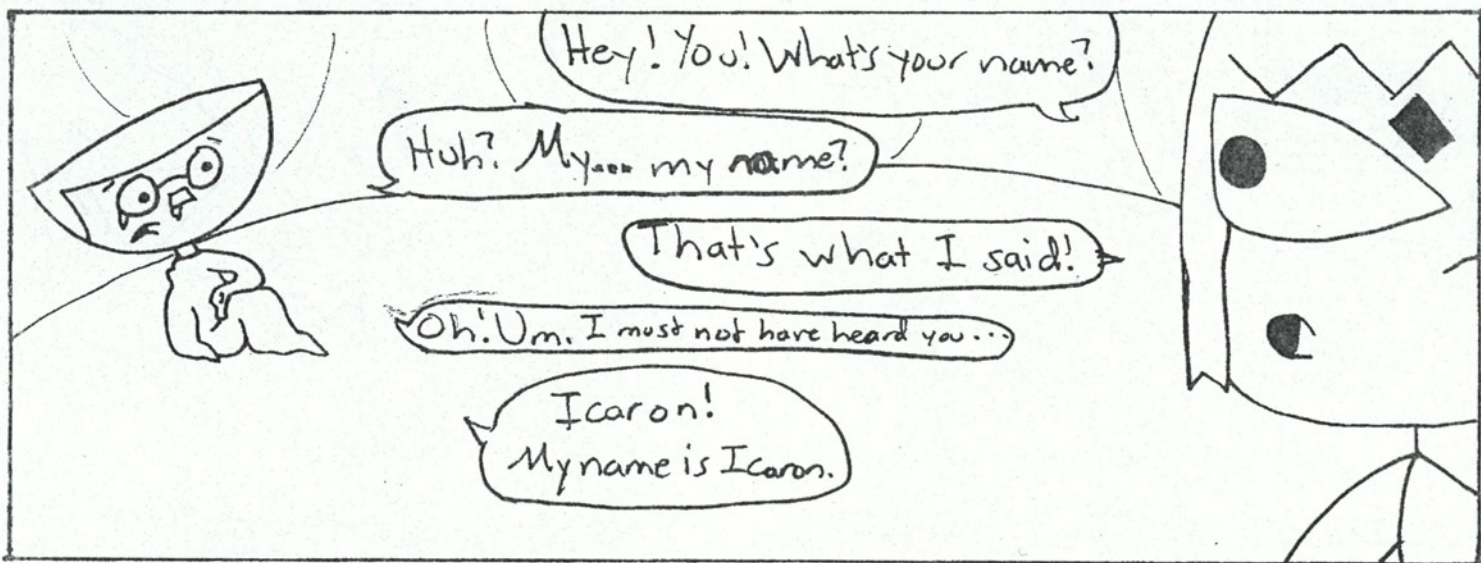
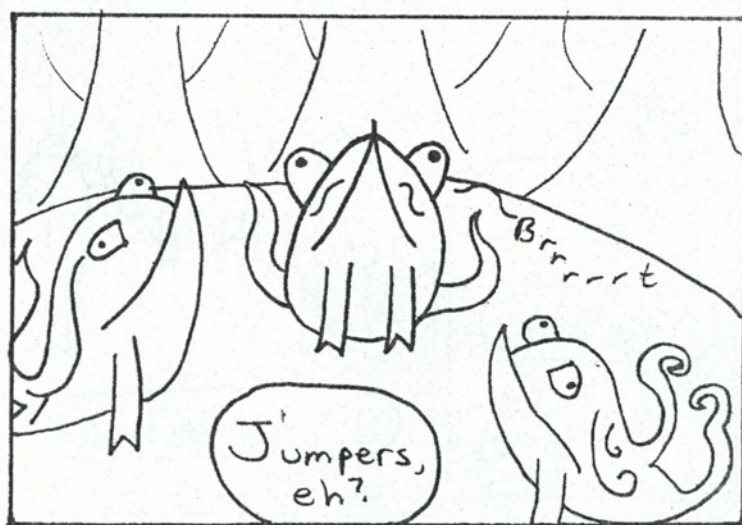
I'm comin'  
for ya, bud!

But, then,  
what should  
I do?

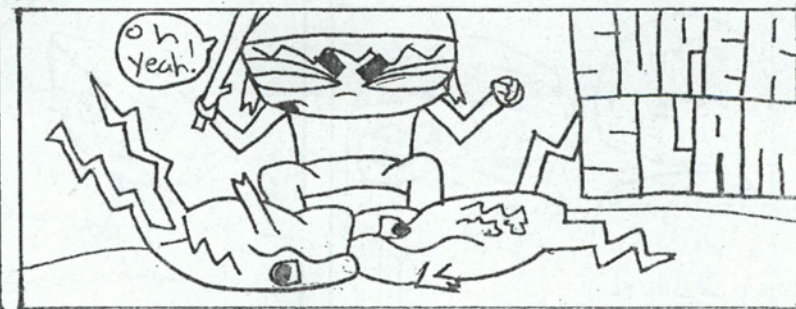
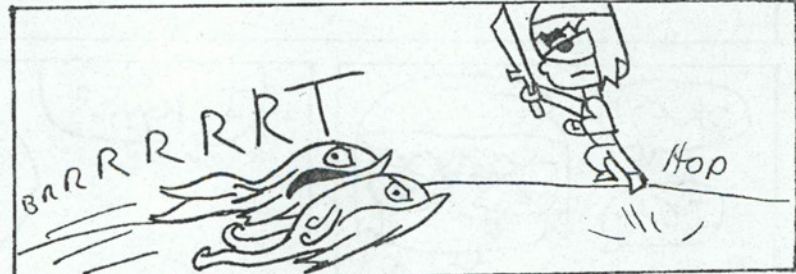
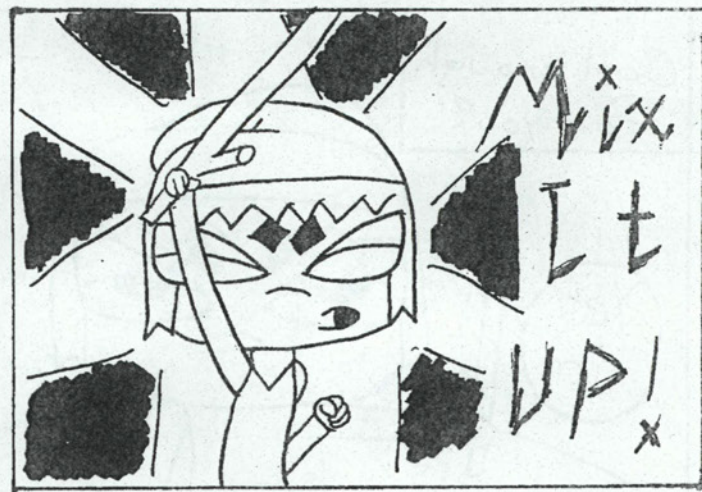




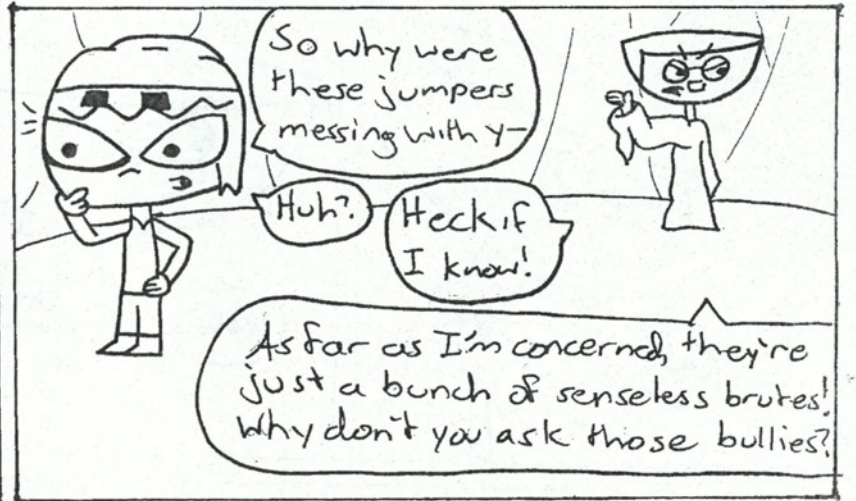
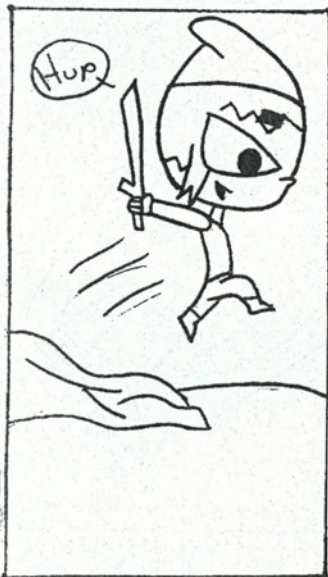




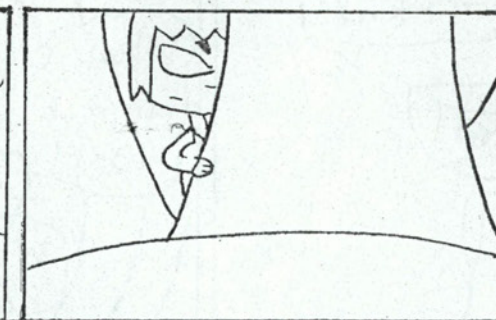
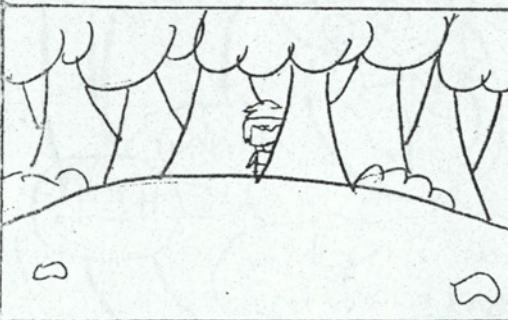
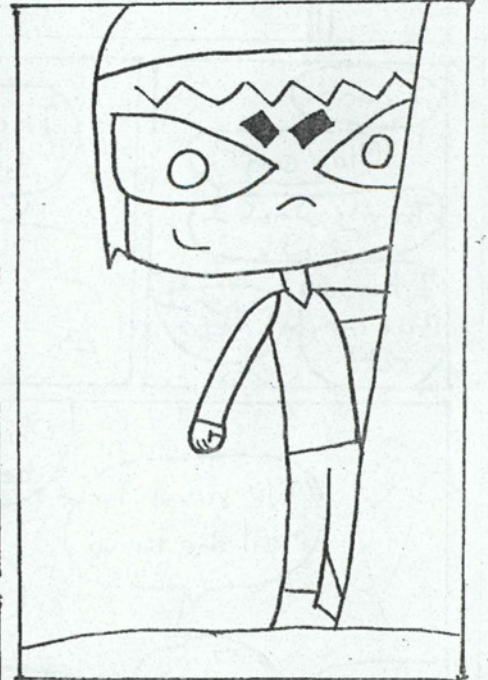
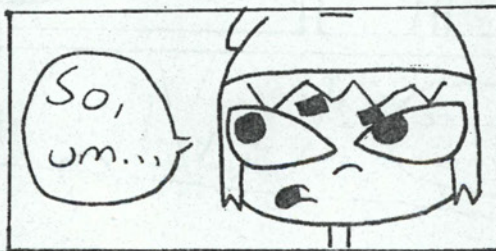
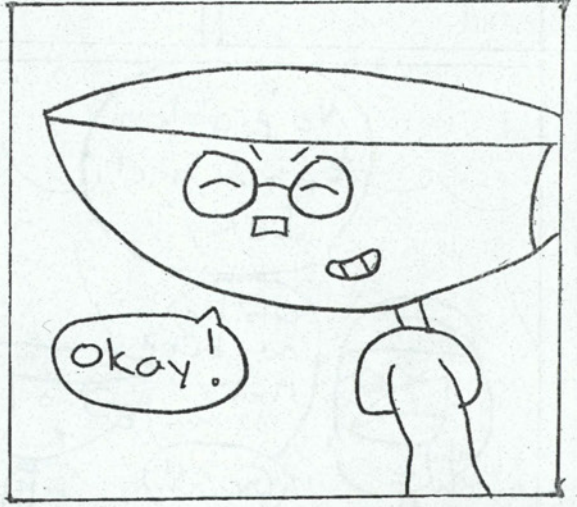
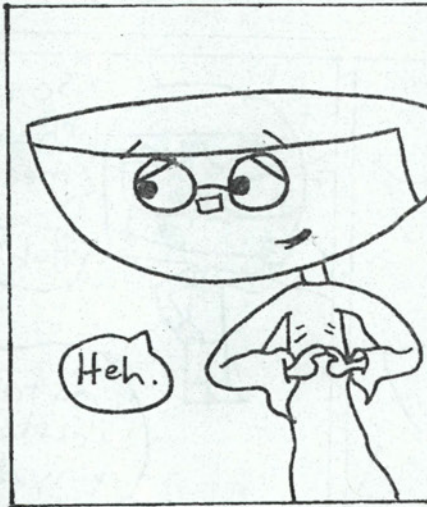
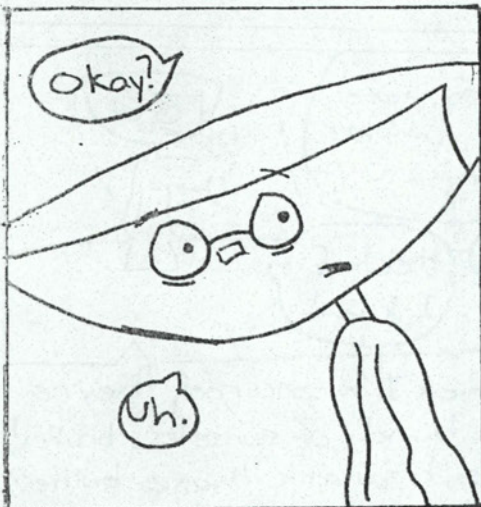
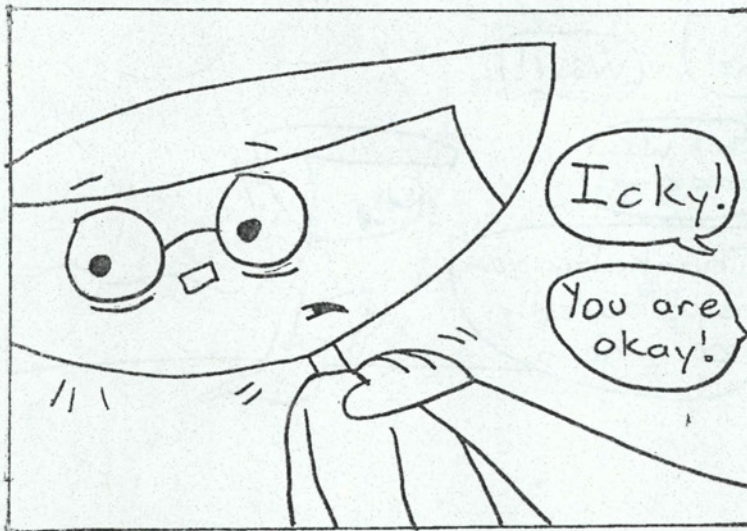














# CHAPTER 2: FOLLOWED?

So, Mix...

Why did you  
come to save  
me?

Why?

Because  
you needed  
help!

Well, yeah, but  
you don't know me.  
You ran towards  
danger, I mean,  
weren't you  
scared?!

No.

No?

Nah.

Just... no.

You needed help.  
I heard you yell,  
so I came. IF I  
was scared, you wouldn't  
be here. Don't you  
get it? IF I'm  
scared, I lose.

And I will  
never lose.

But there must be  
something you're  
afraid of. No one  
is totally fearless!

(Sigh)  
(You don't get it.)

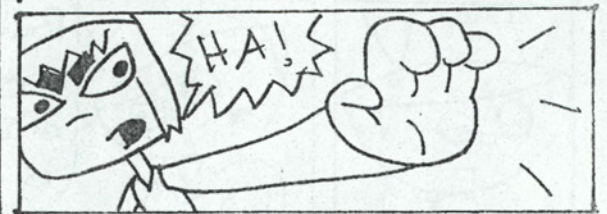
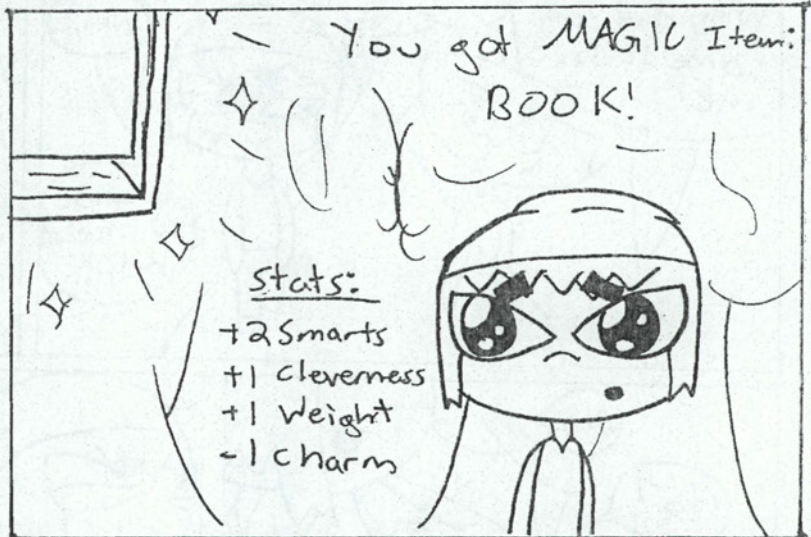
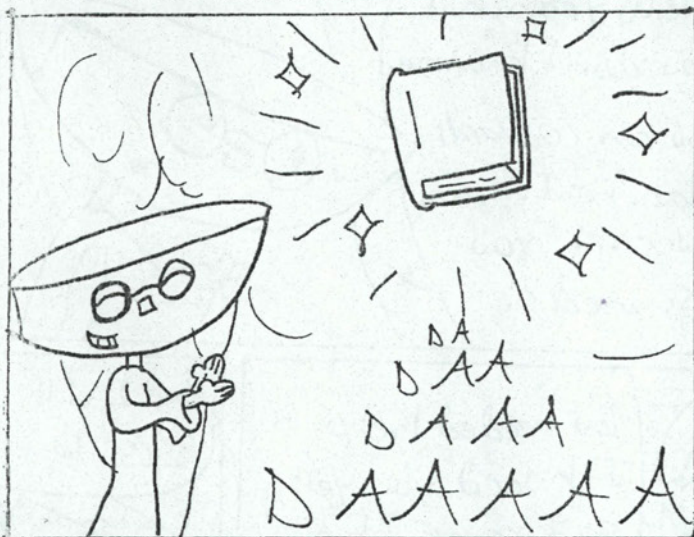
Get what?!  
You'd have  
to be a  
robot to be  
totally  
fearless,  
and-

You're...  
not a robot,  
right?

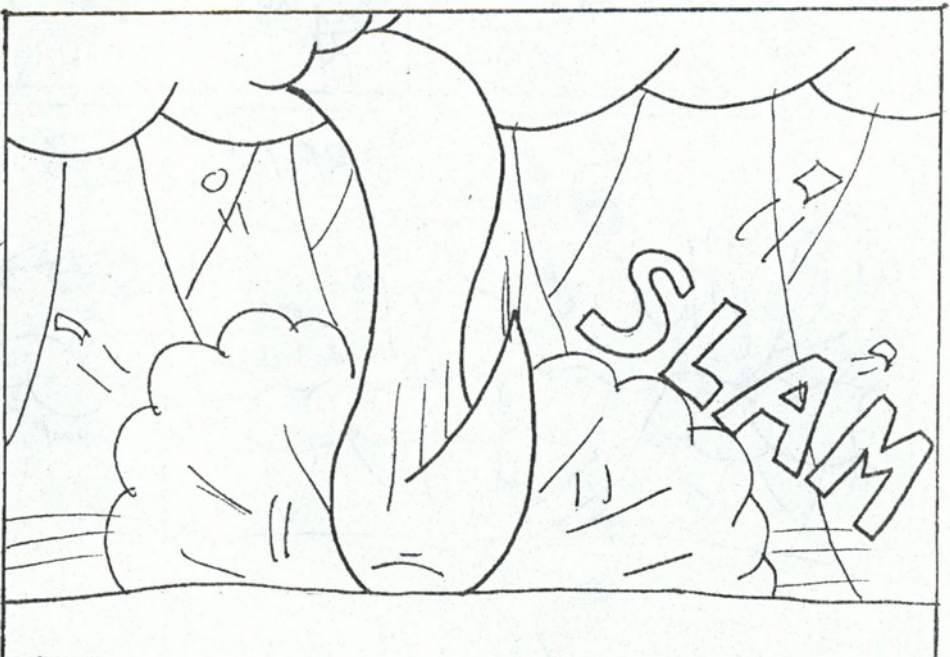
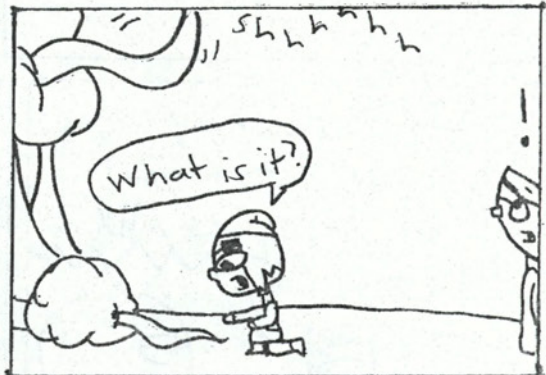
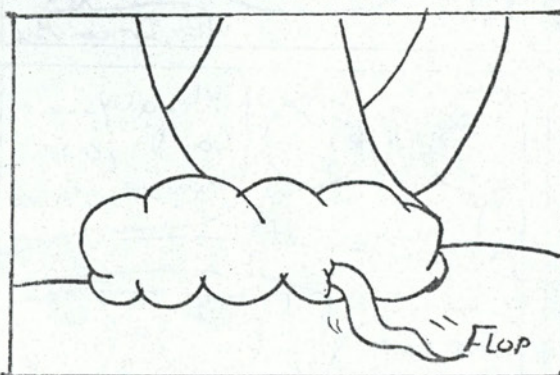
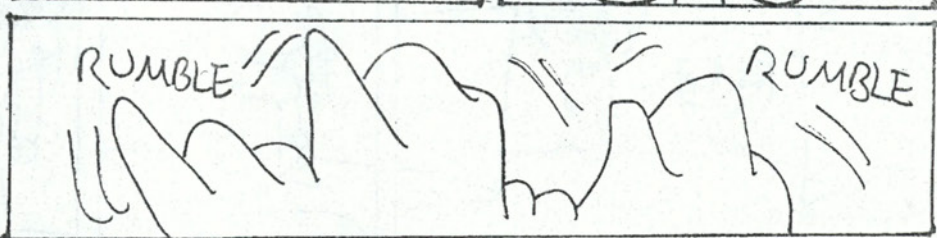
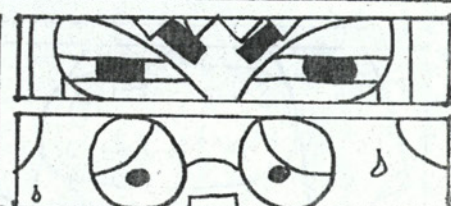
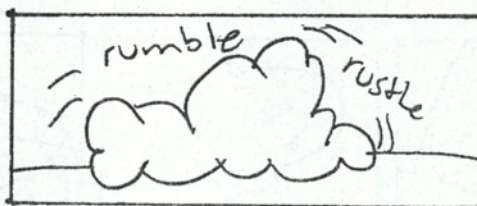
No!

I just - look, it's easy to  
be afraid. But fear is only  
as powerful as you let it  
be, right? That's what my  
dad tells me. So I just  
don't give fear any power.  
I choose not to be afraid.

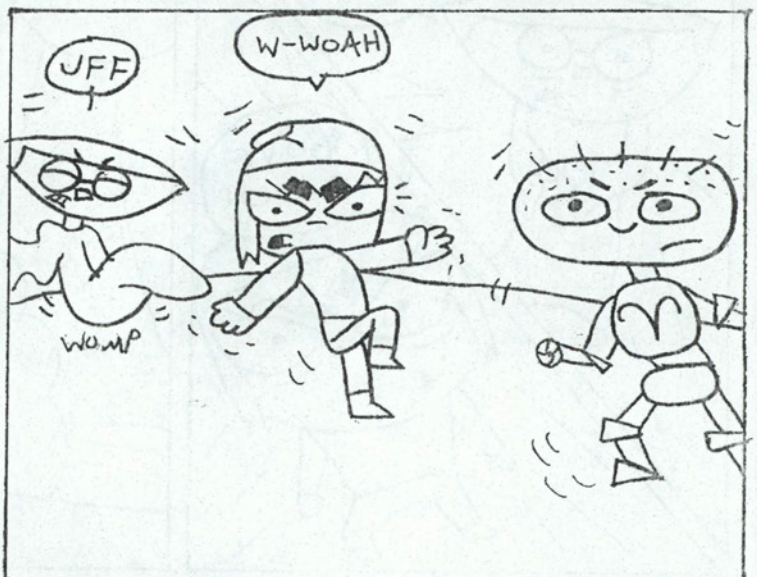
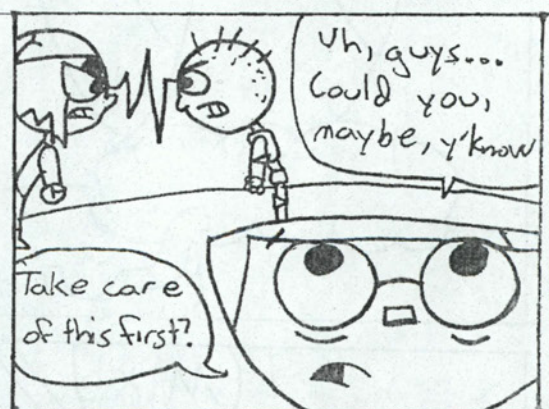
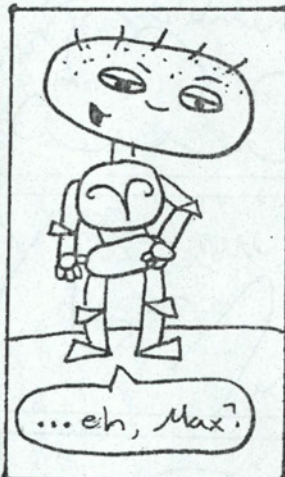
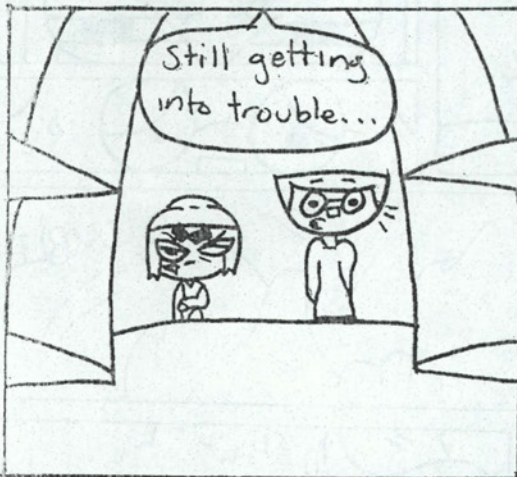
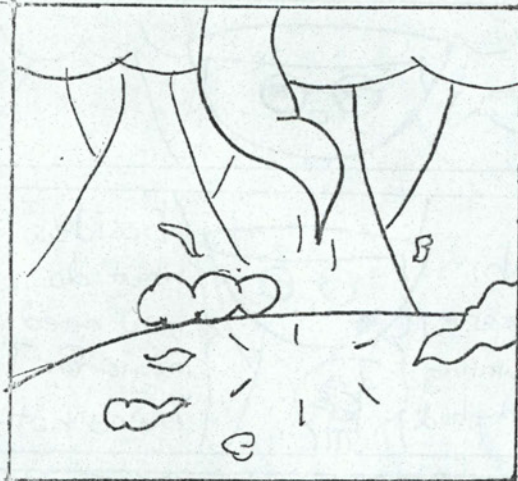




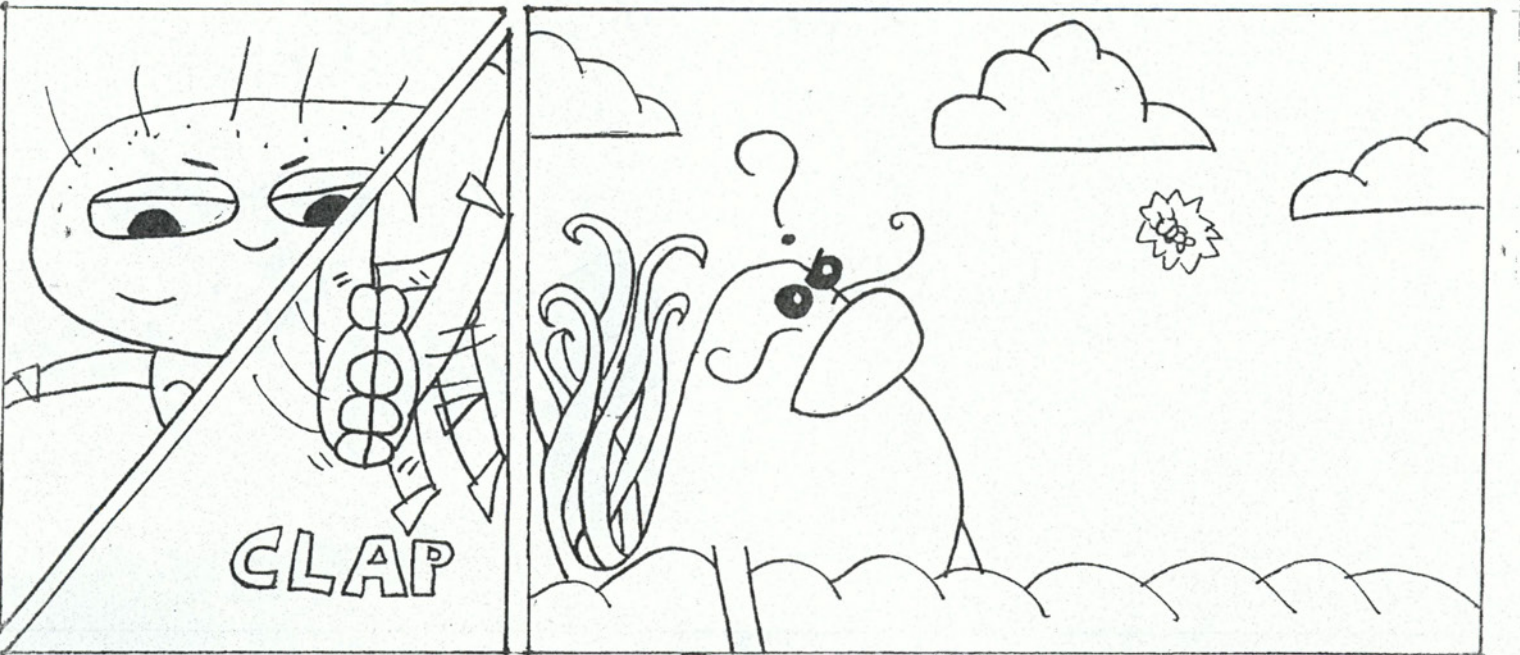
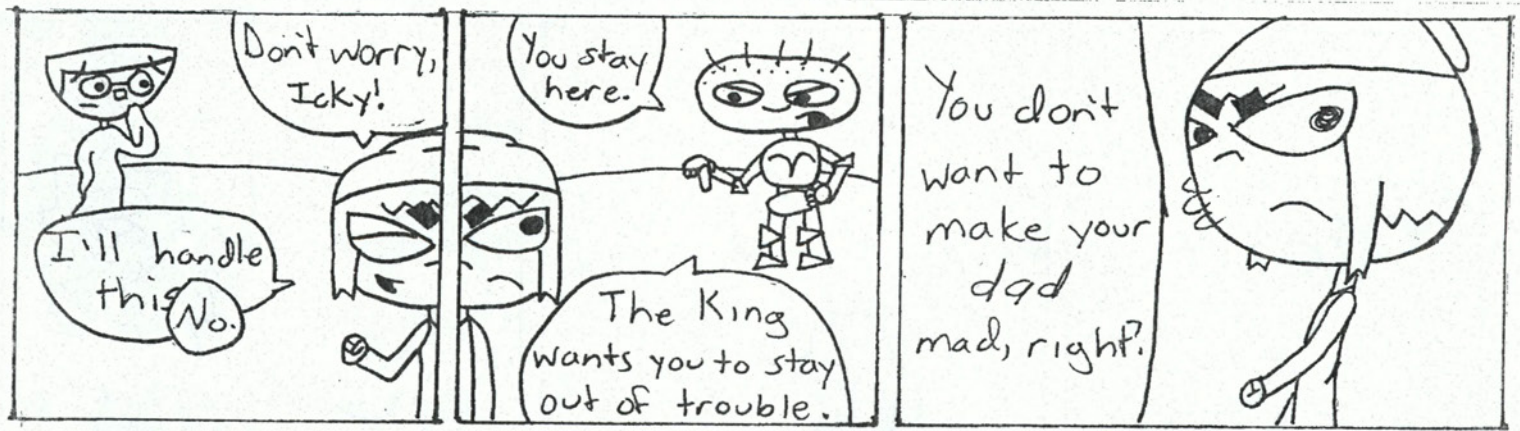








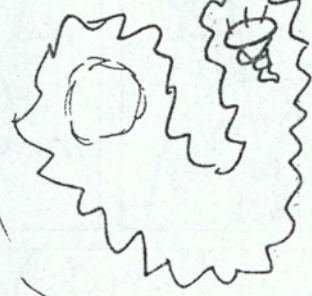




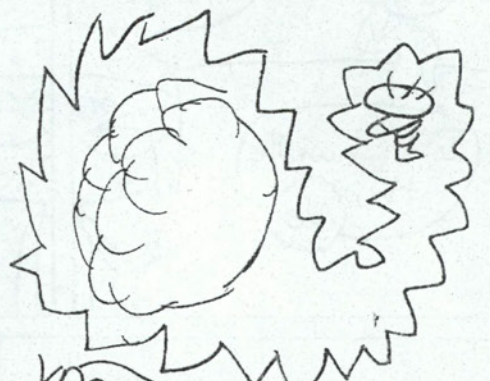




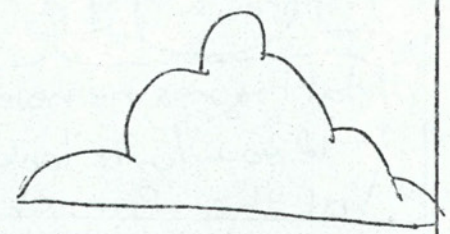
VRRR



VRRRR

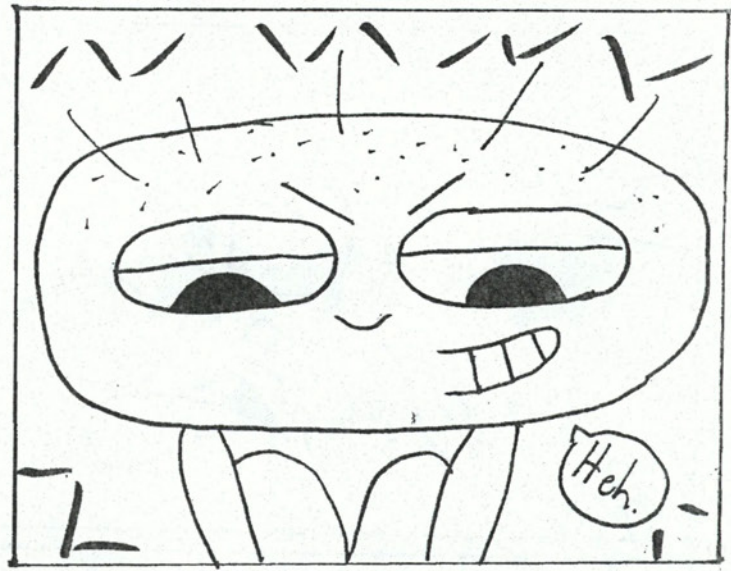
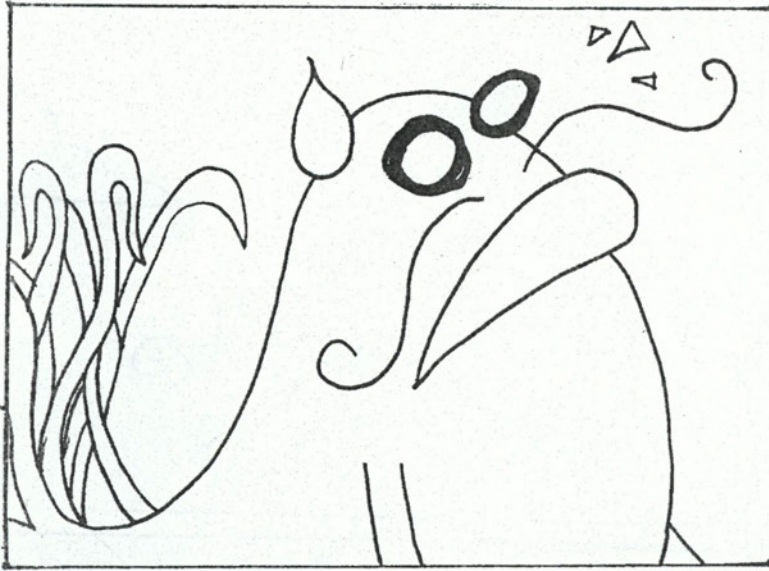


VRRRRR RRRRR



RRR R R BE OW





DOUBLE-FIST

MEGA



SMASH

CRACK

BOOM

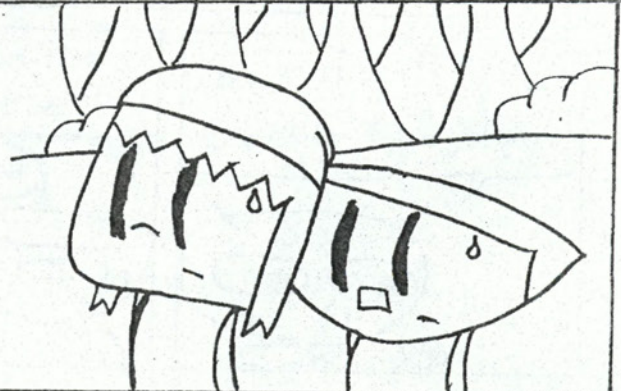
BAM

(pummel)

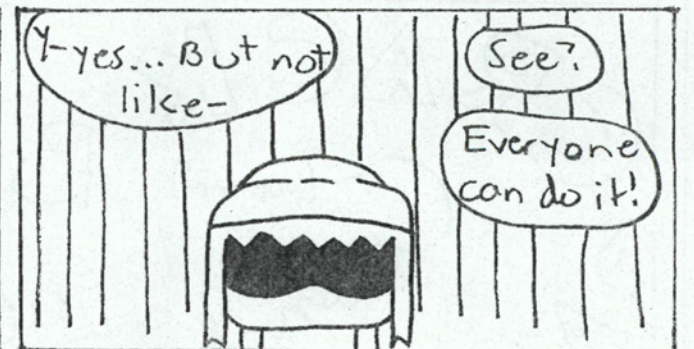
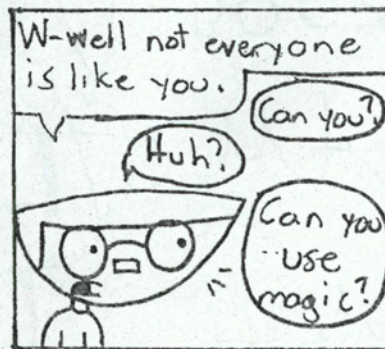
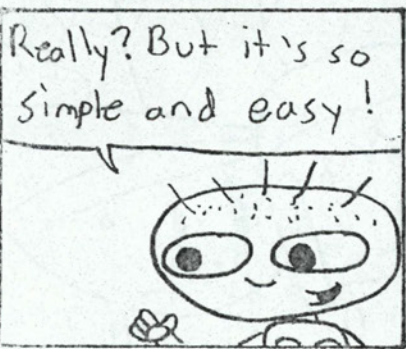
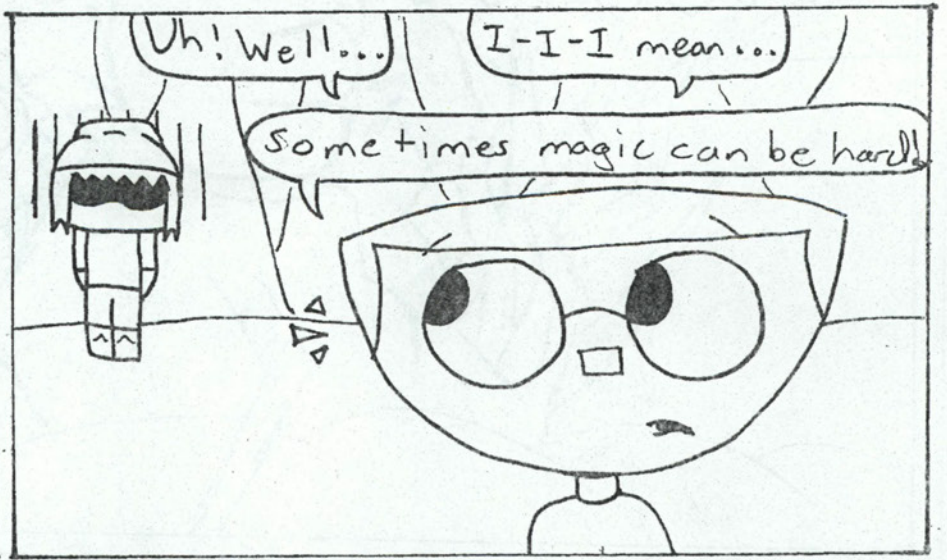
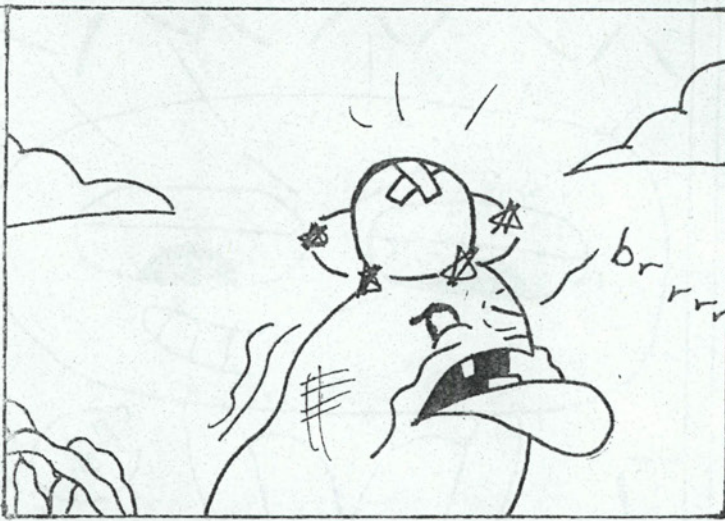
Crunch

MOLL

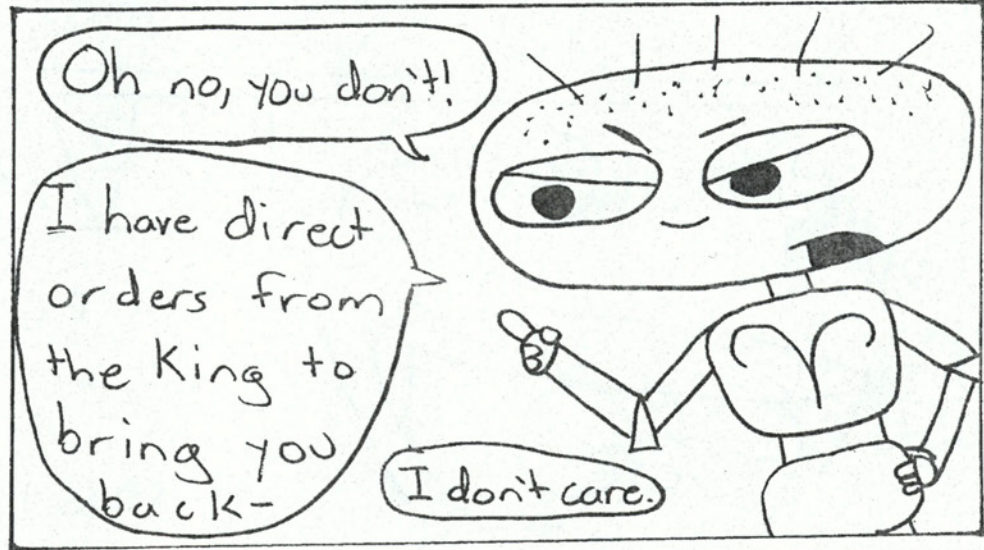
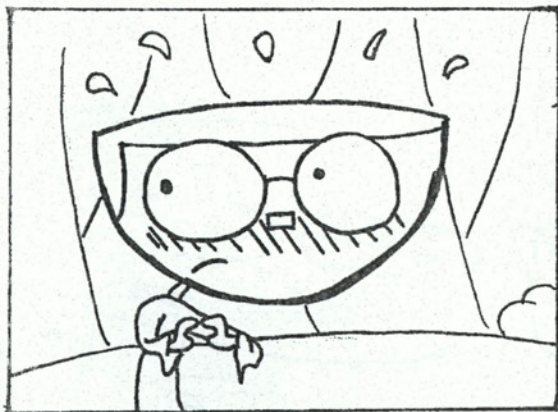
BAM



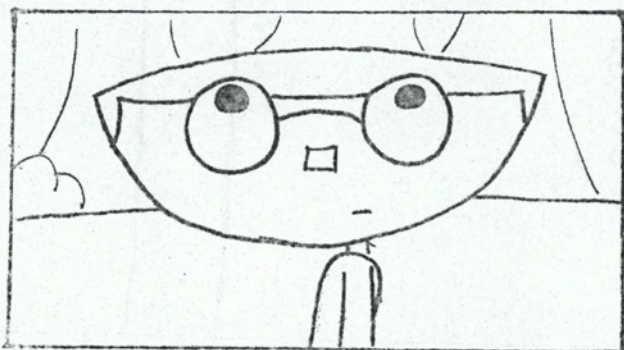
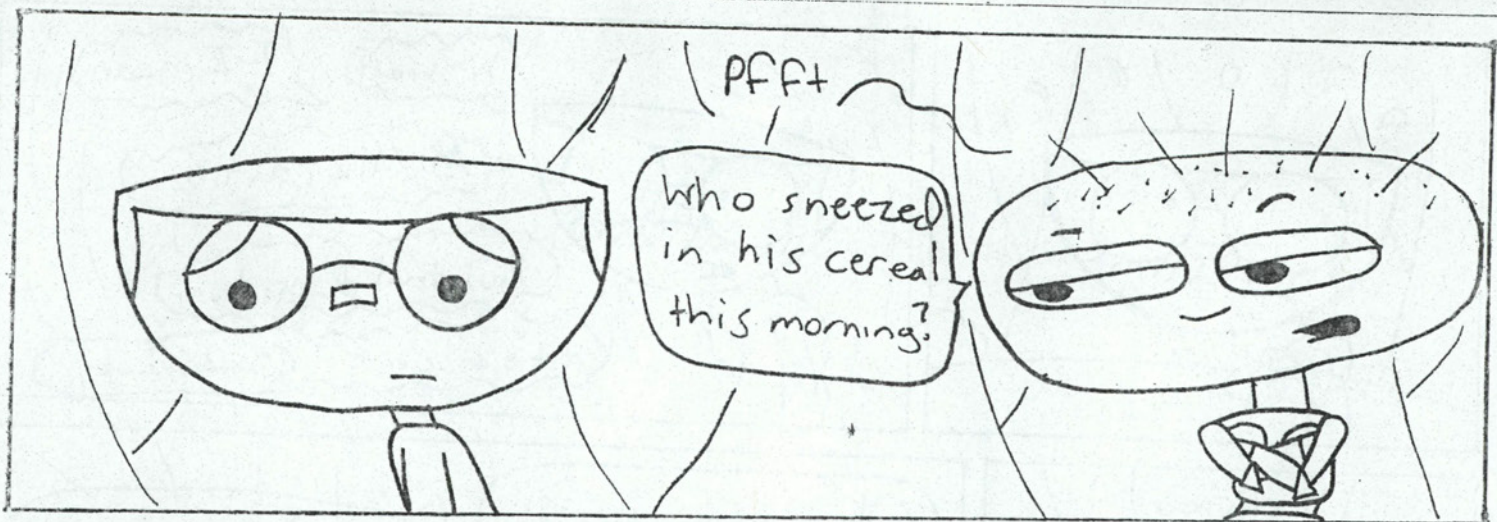














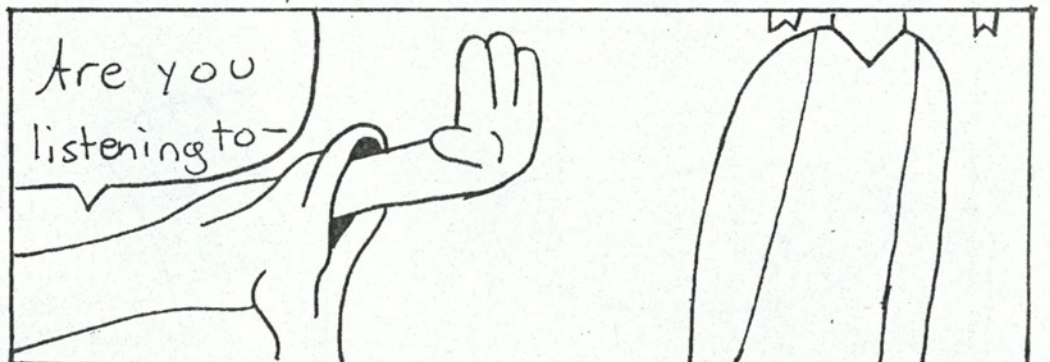
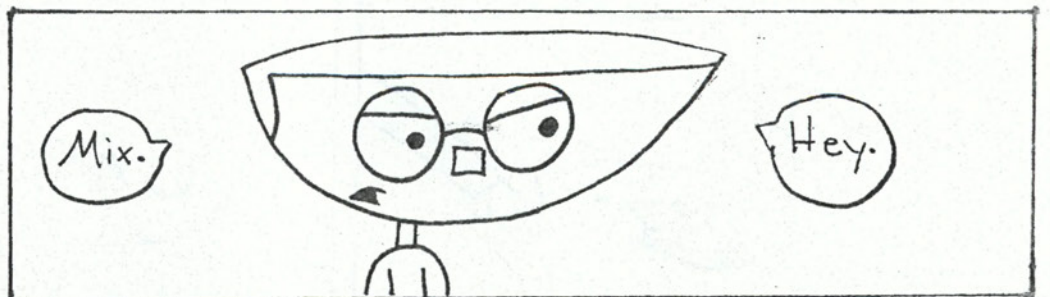
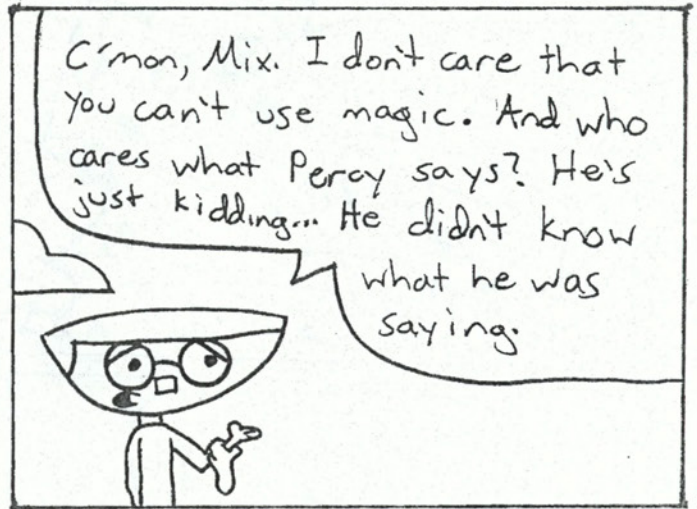
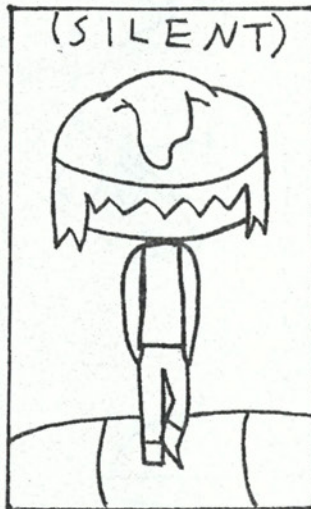
# CHAPTER 3

## DAO

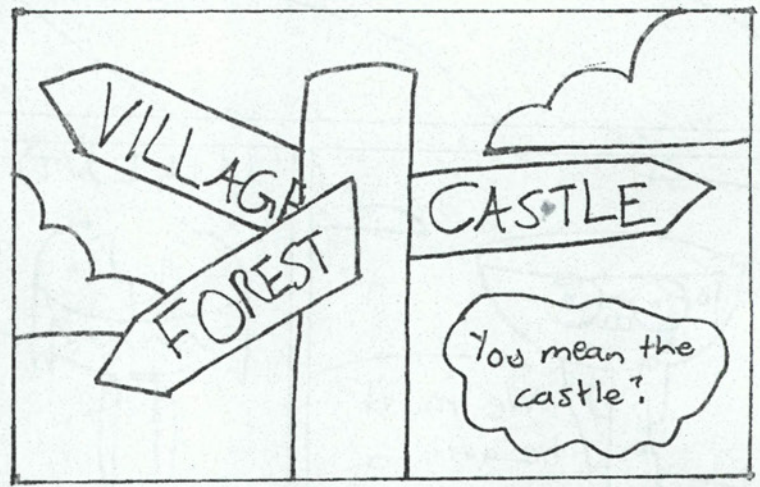
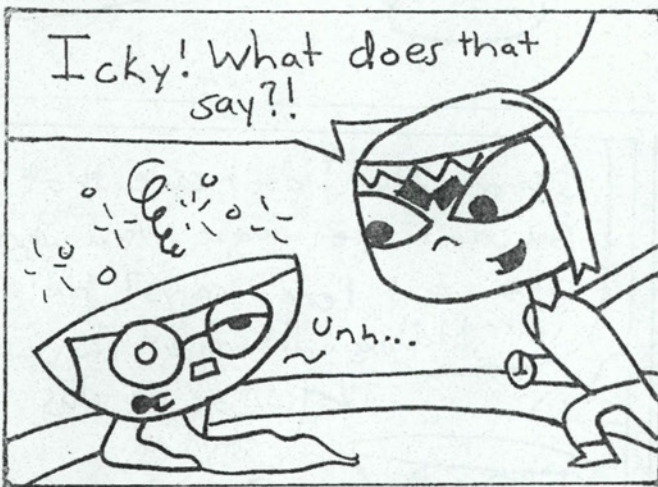
Well...

Looks like we made it out of the forest!

...









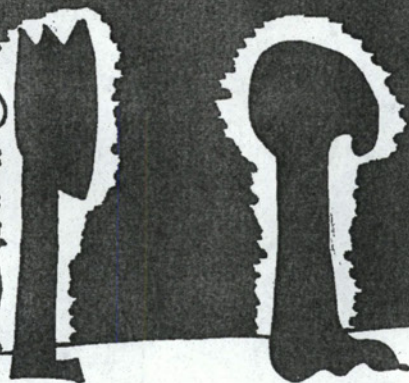
Meanwhile, at the castle ...

I thought we  
had an arrangement...

You said you'd get  
rid of his "problem."

Hmph!

I thought the  
King would be  
wiser than  
this.



You said you'd get  
rid of that ...  
that thing.

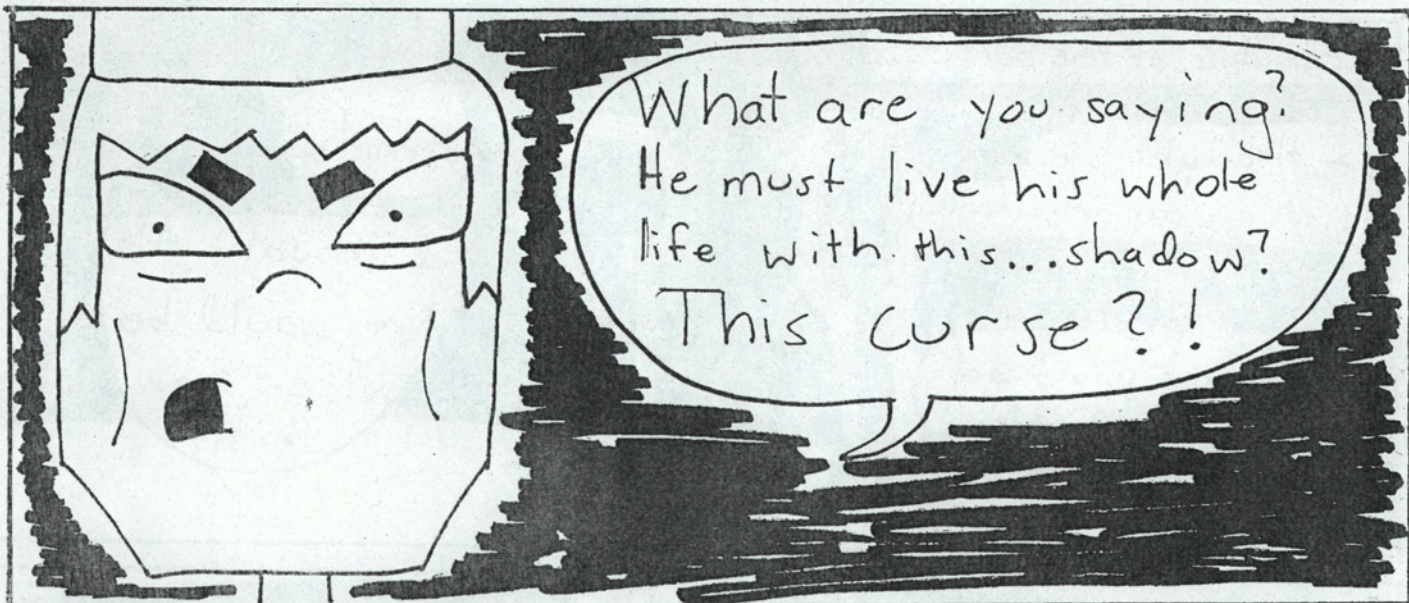
Why is it still  
following him  
around?

Ha! Fool.

You can't get  
rid of his  
shadow.

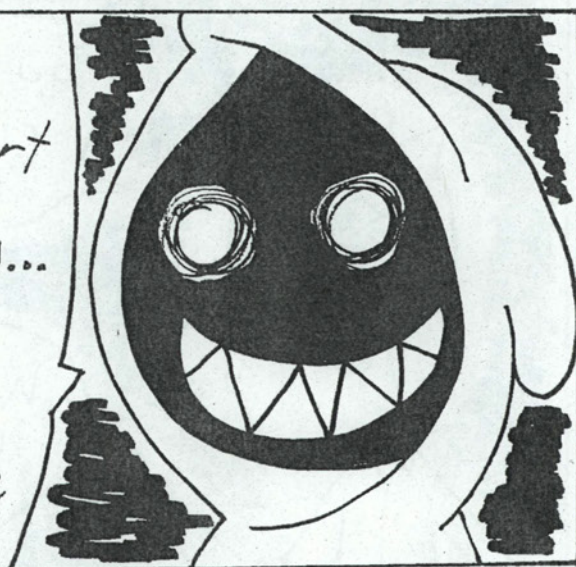






What are you saying?  
He must live his whole  
life with this...shadow?  
This curse?!

Oh, I wouldn't call it a curse!  
No, no! His shadow is a part  
of him. Without his shadow...  
Well, then there's no Mix! His  
only chance is to embrace  
his shadow... and become one  
with it!

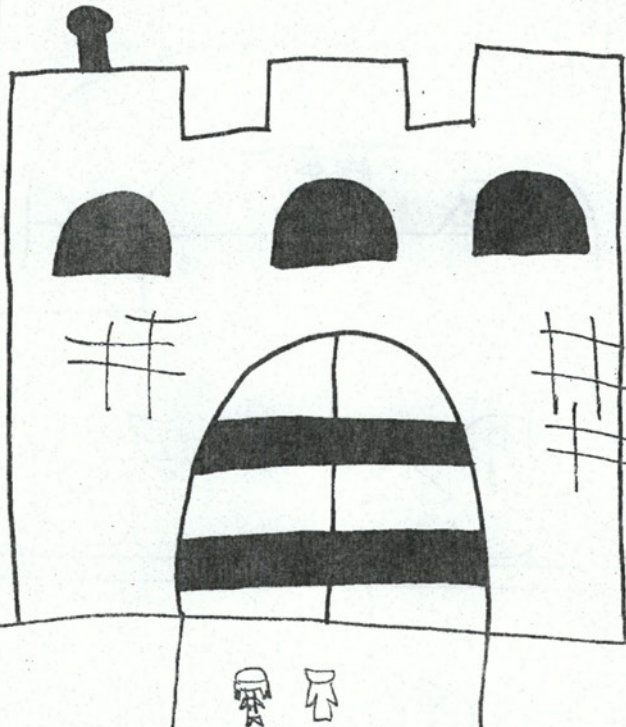


And I'll  
make sure  
he does.



I wonder what  
Mix and Icky are  
up to now?

Finally!



Is there  
someone  
up there?

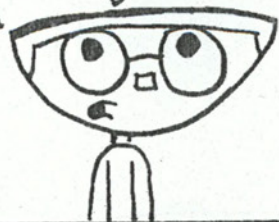


YO!  
OPEN UP!



(does nothing)  
↑

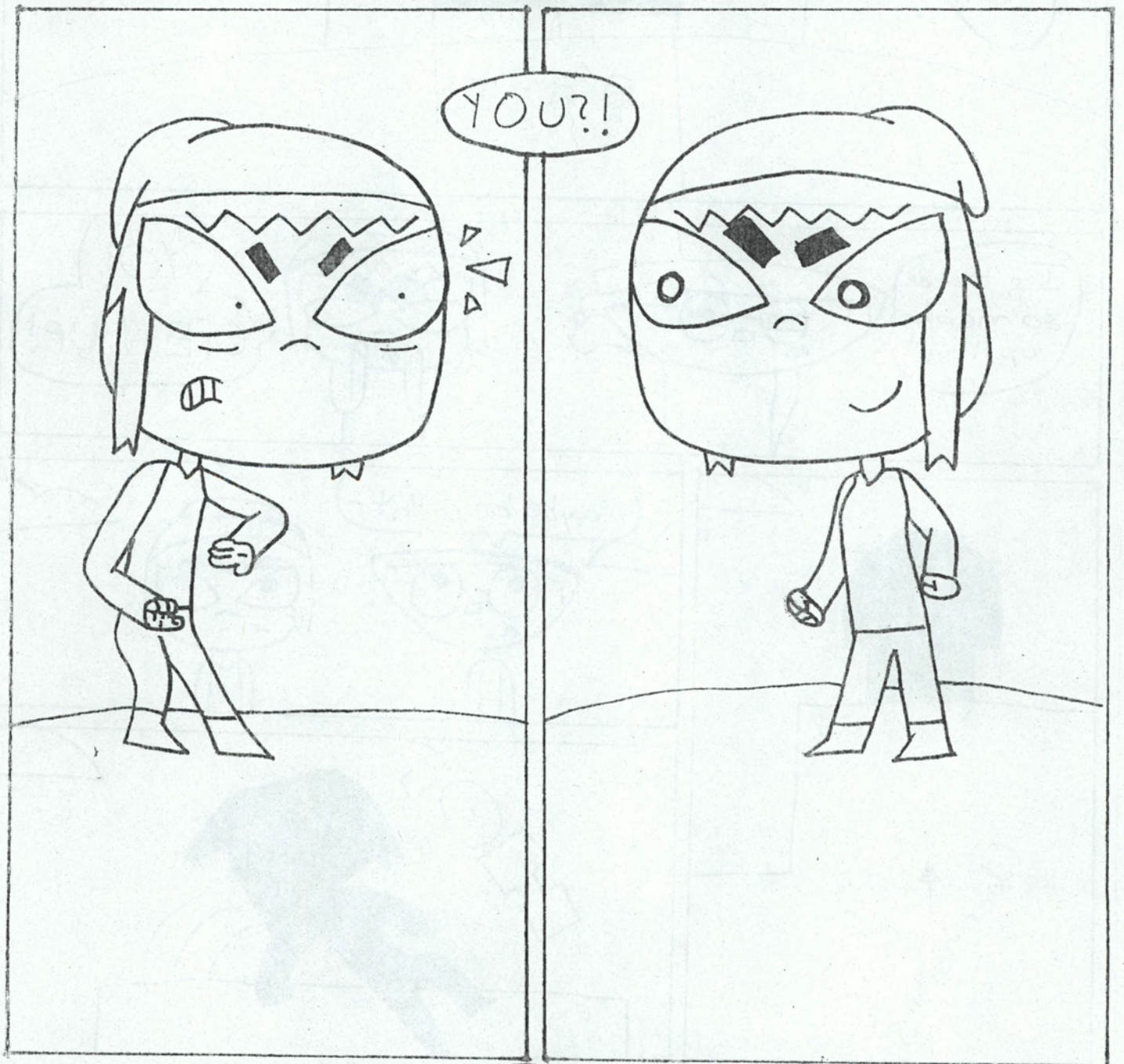
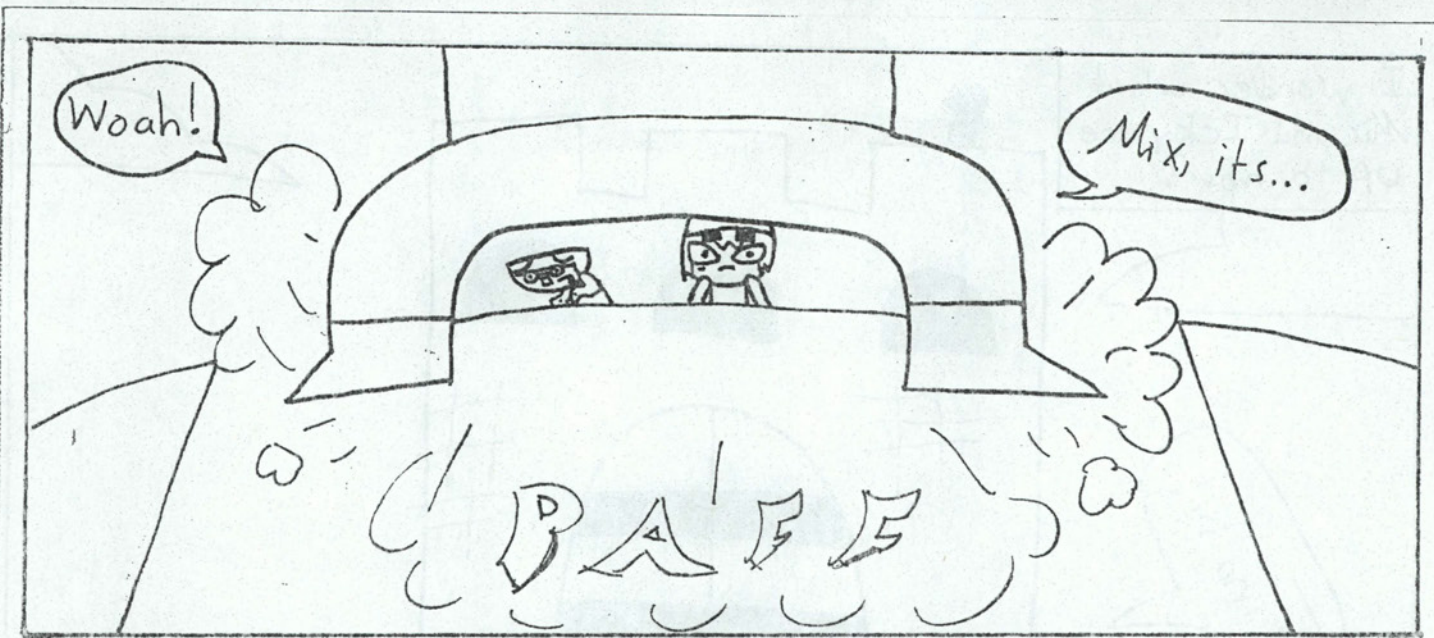
Maybe he didn't--



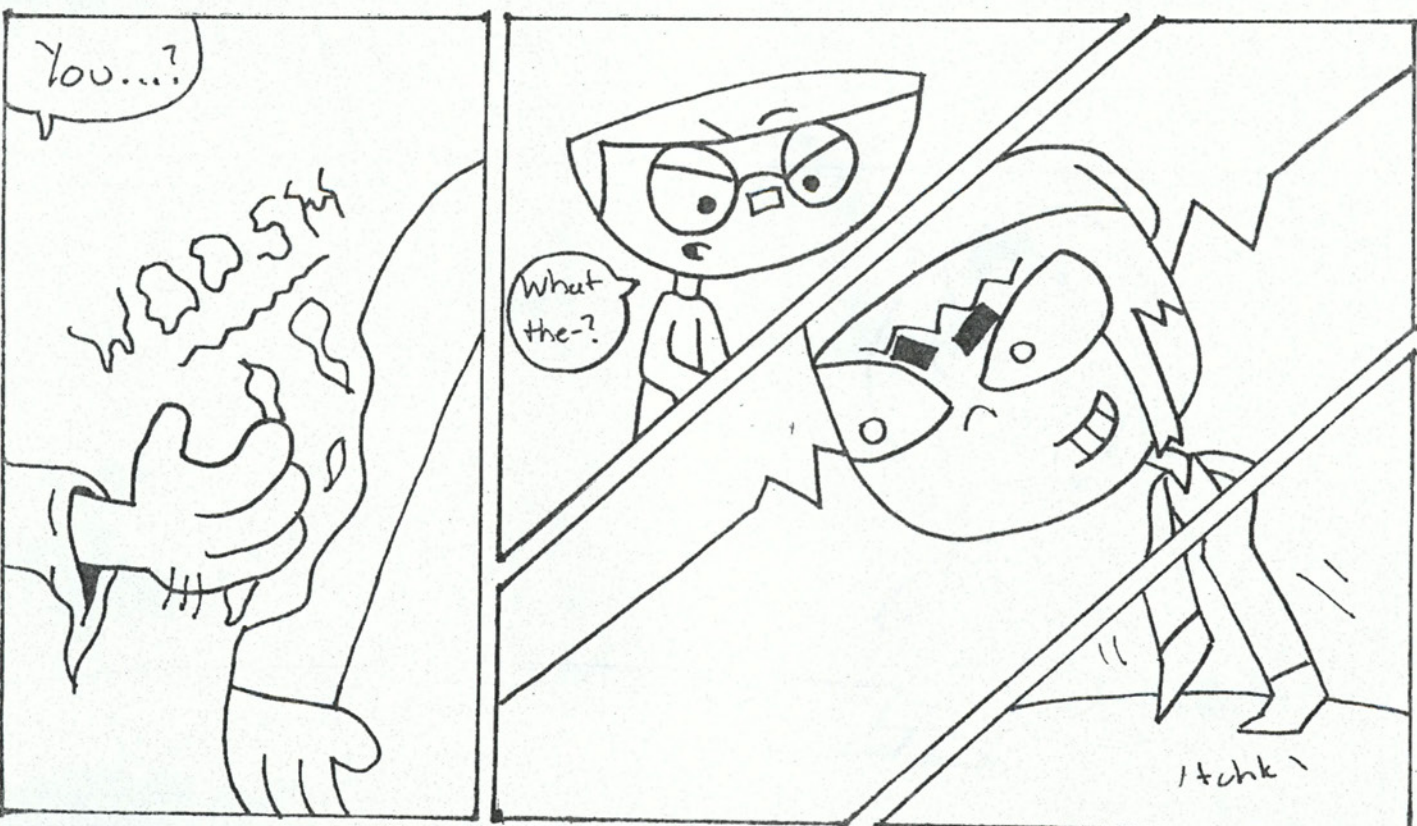
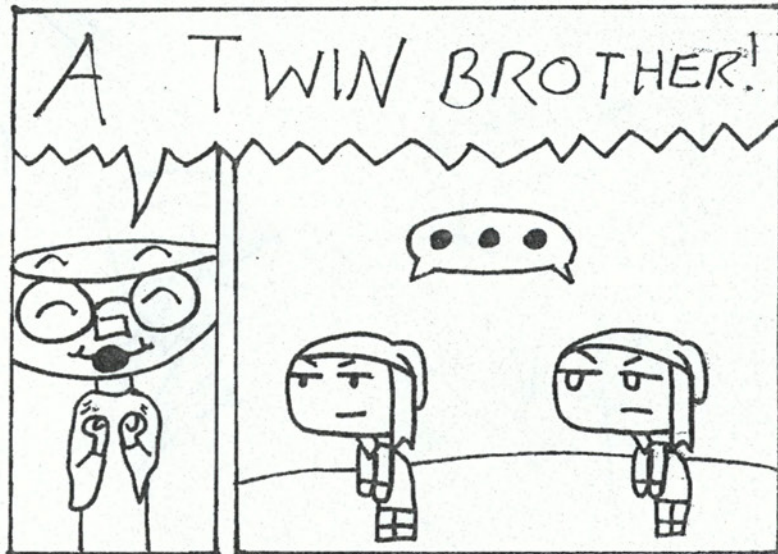
HOP



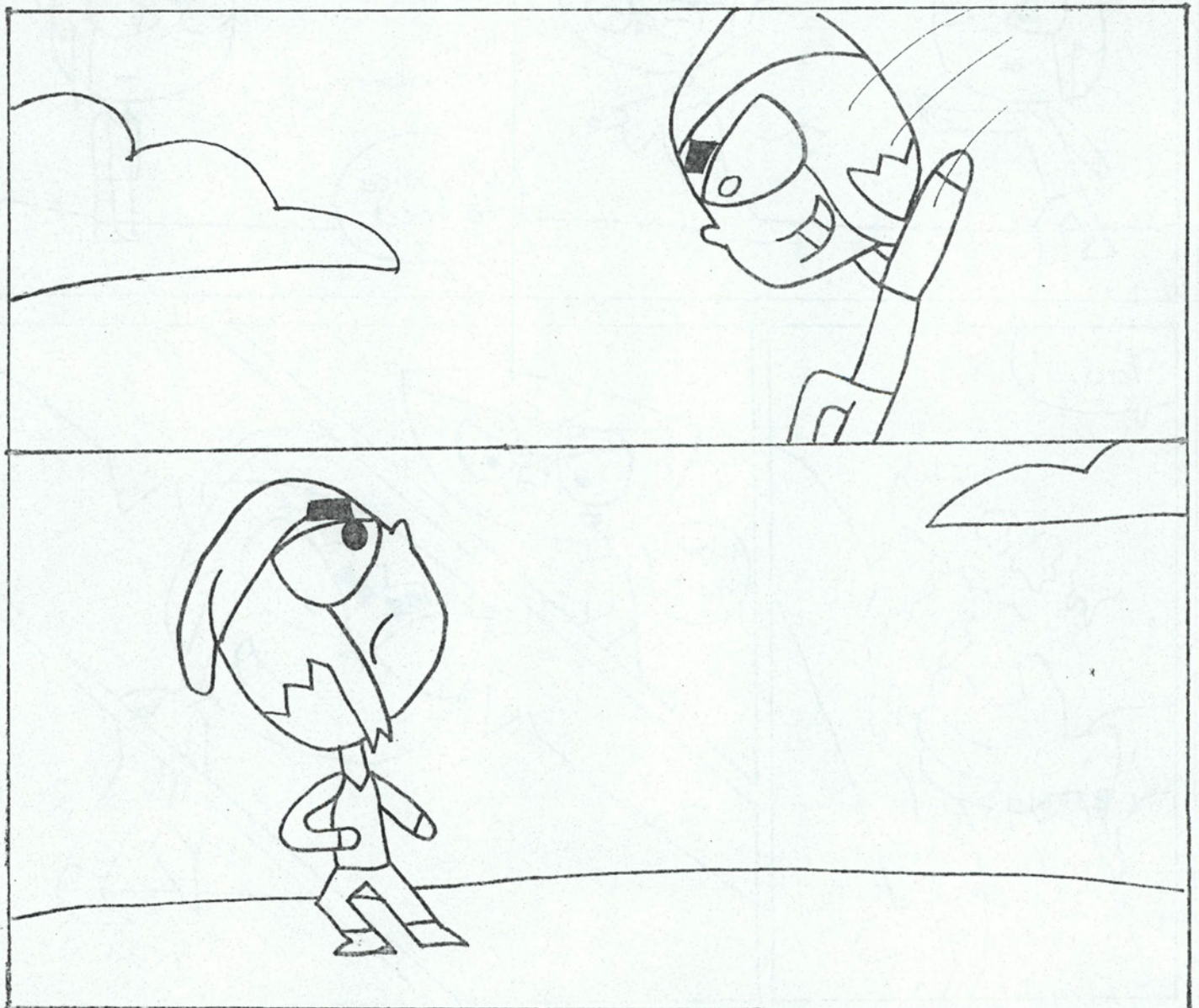
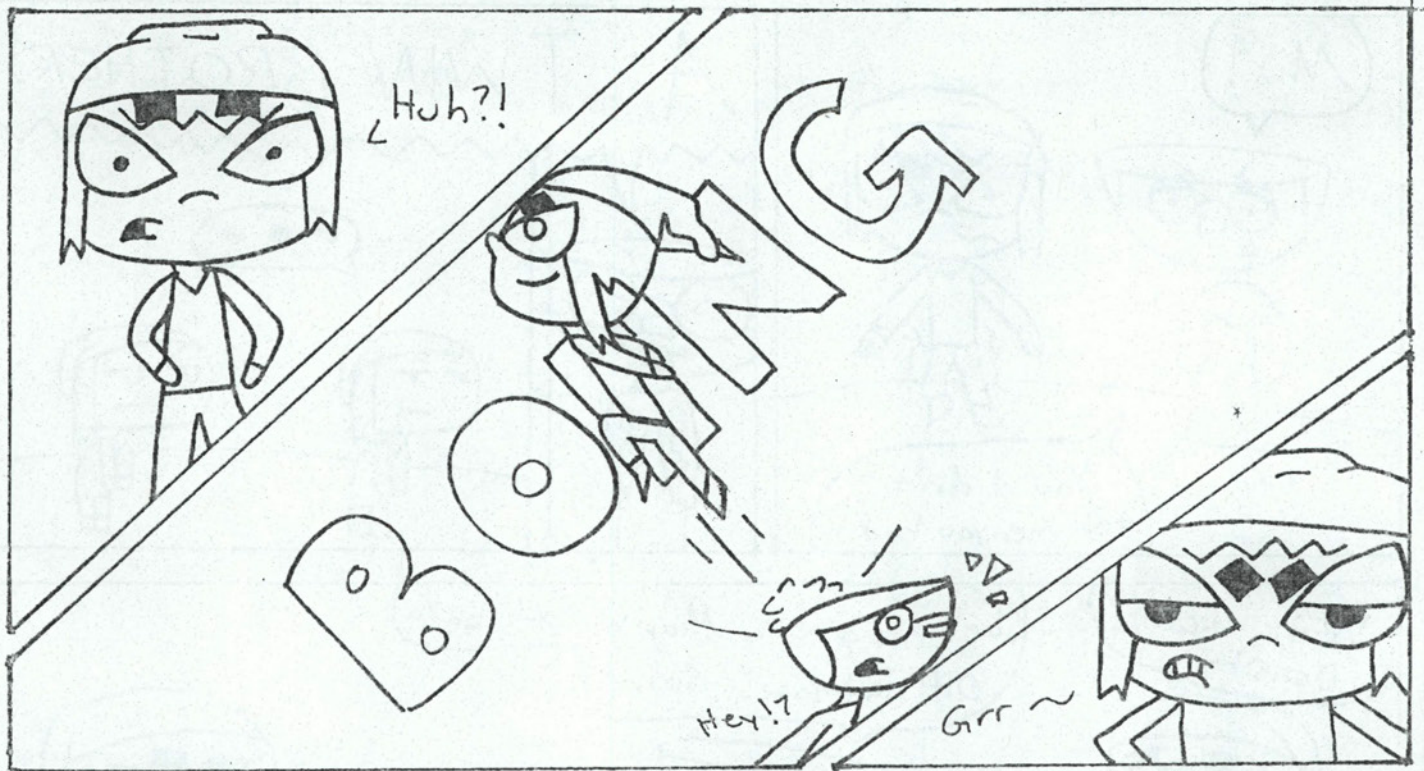




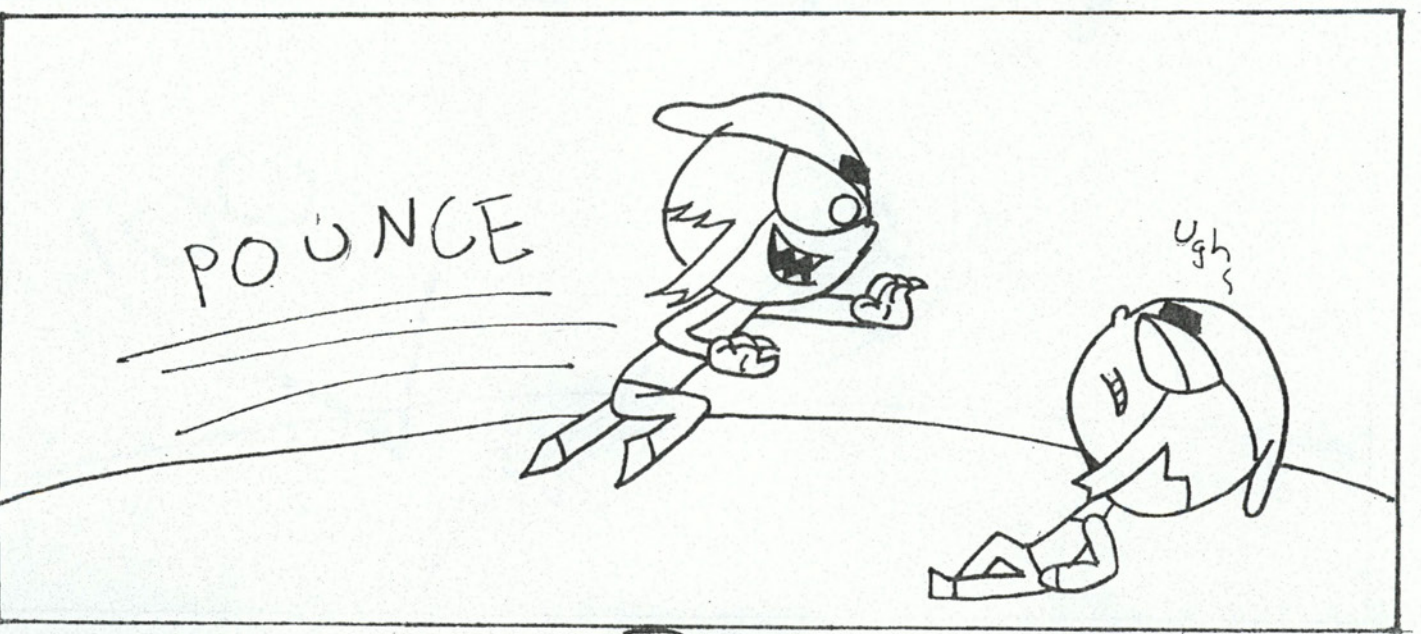
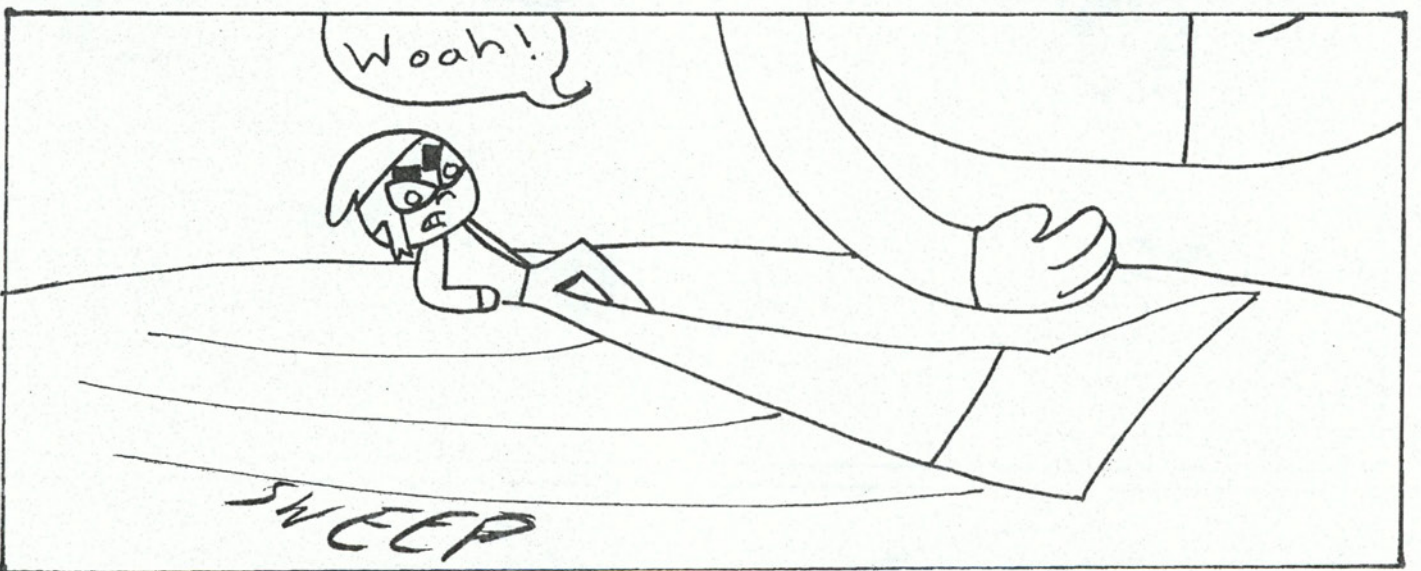
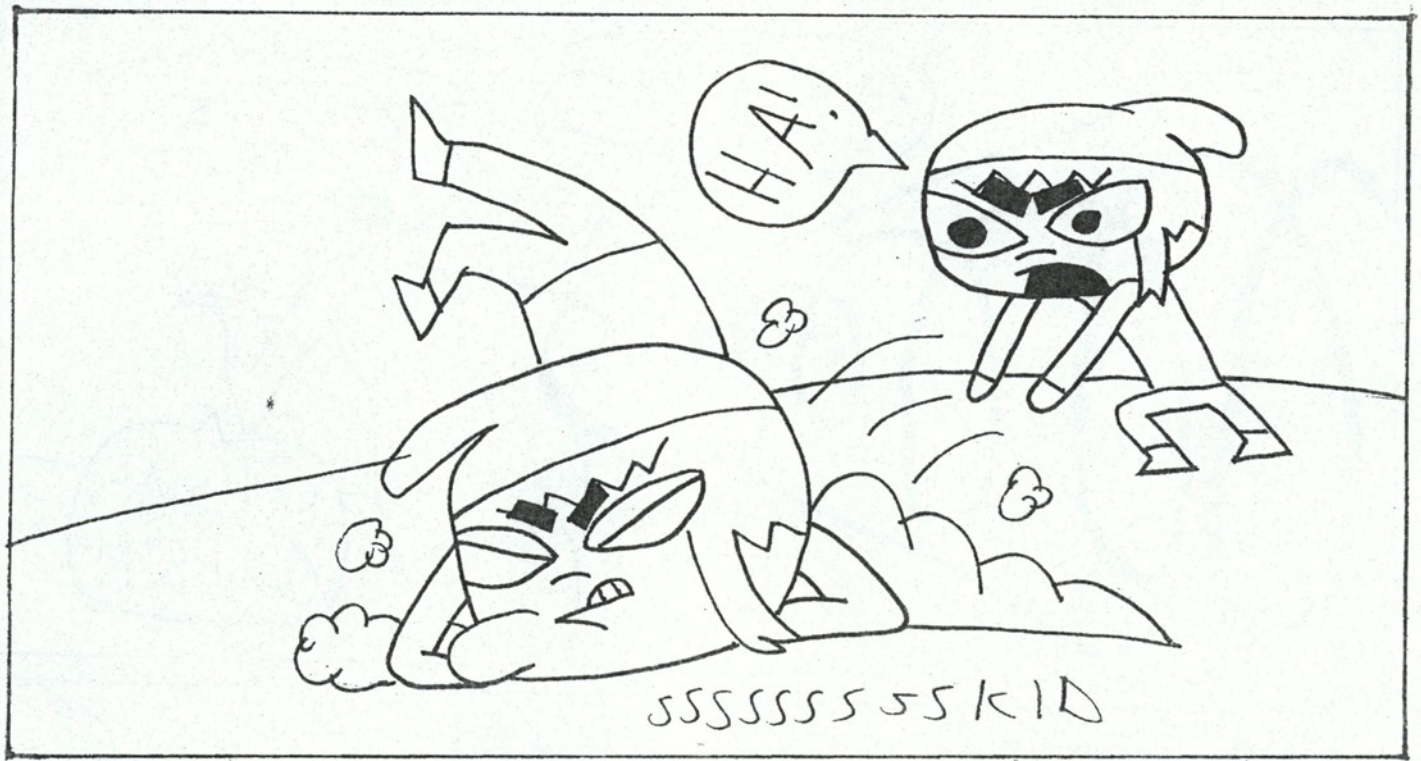




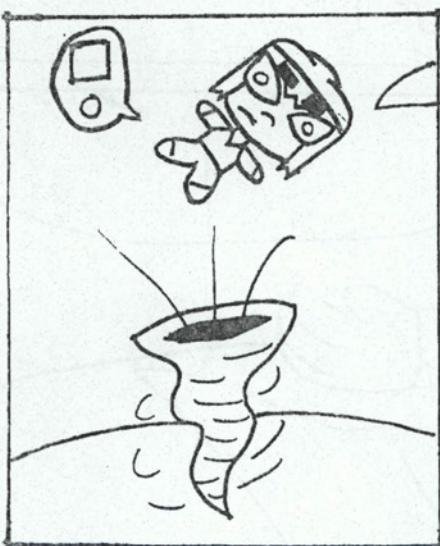
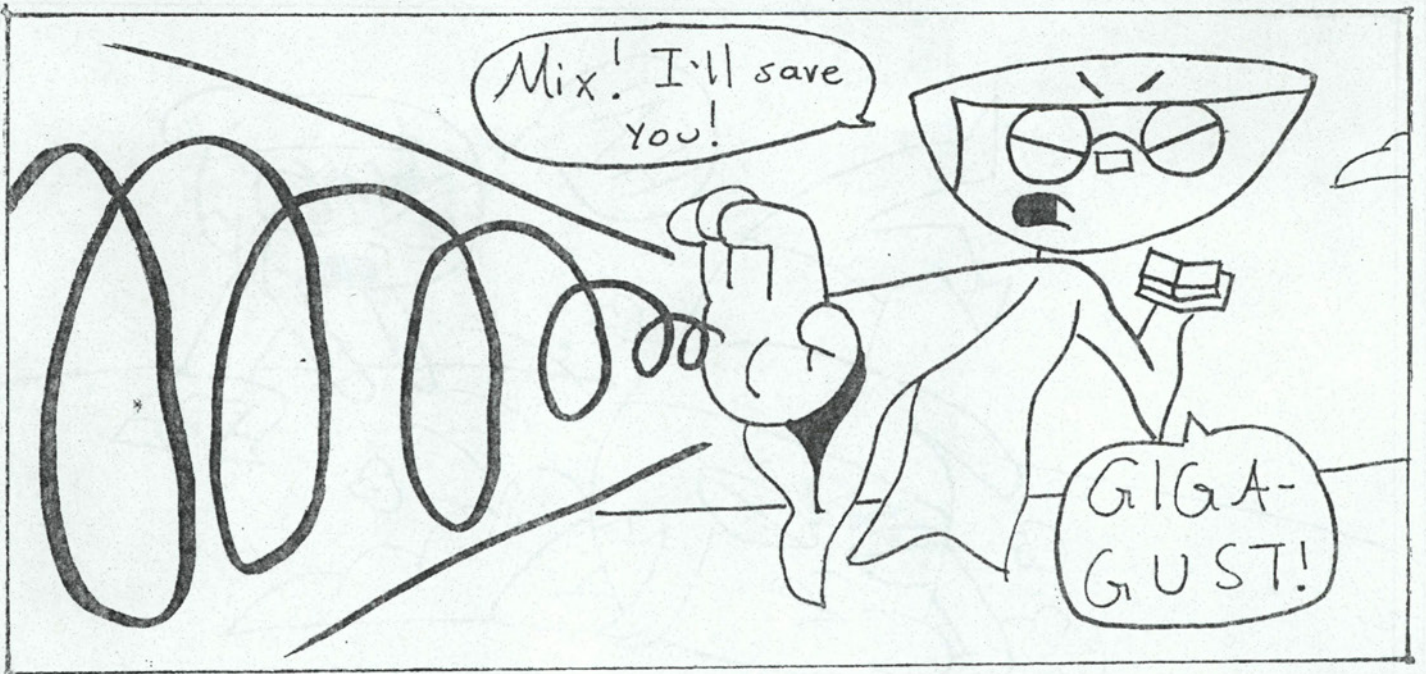




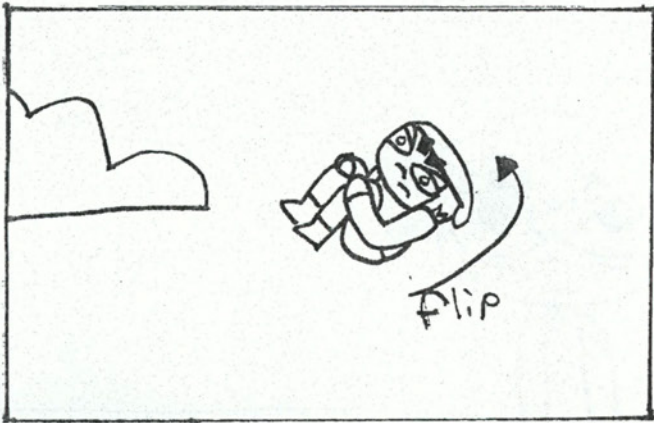




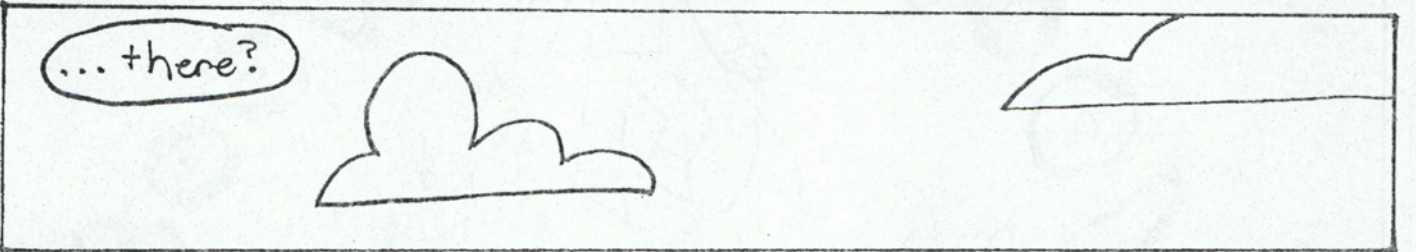
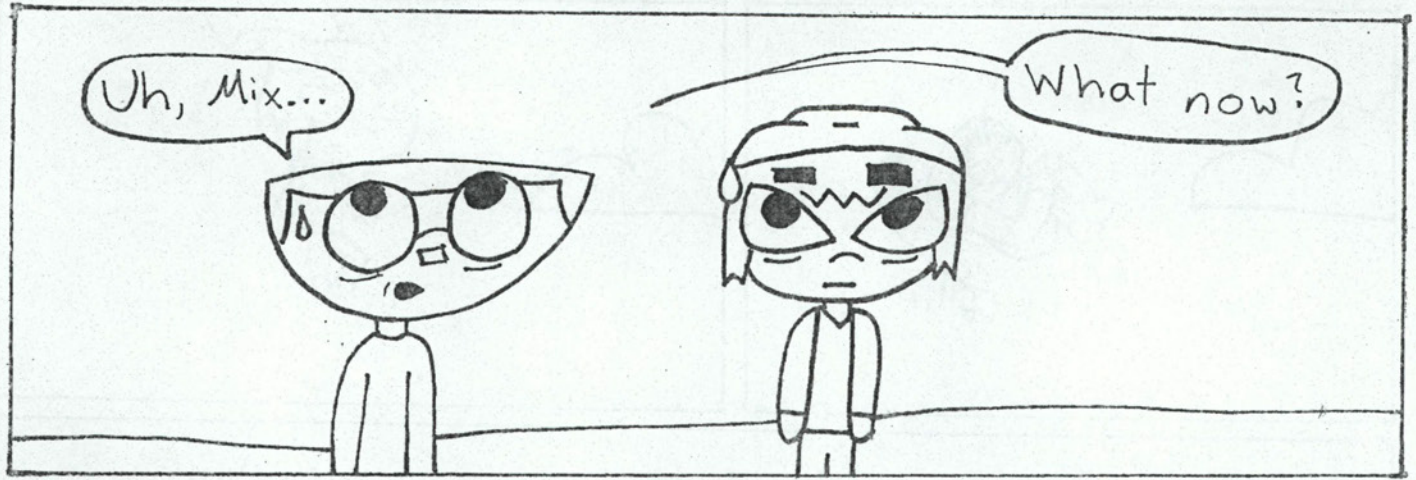




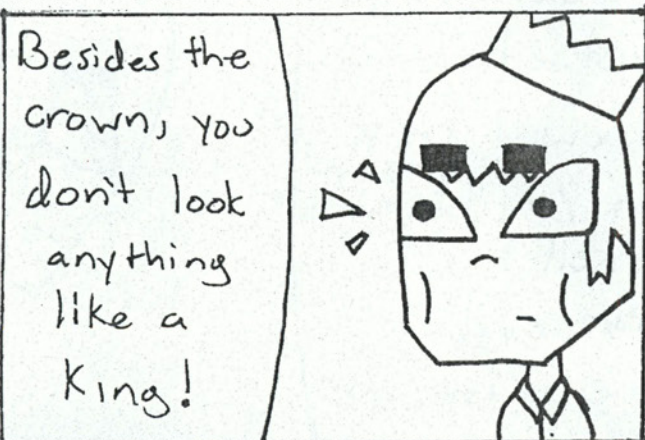




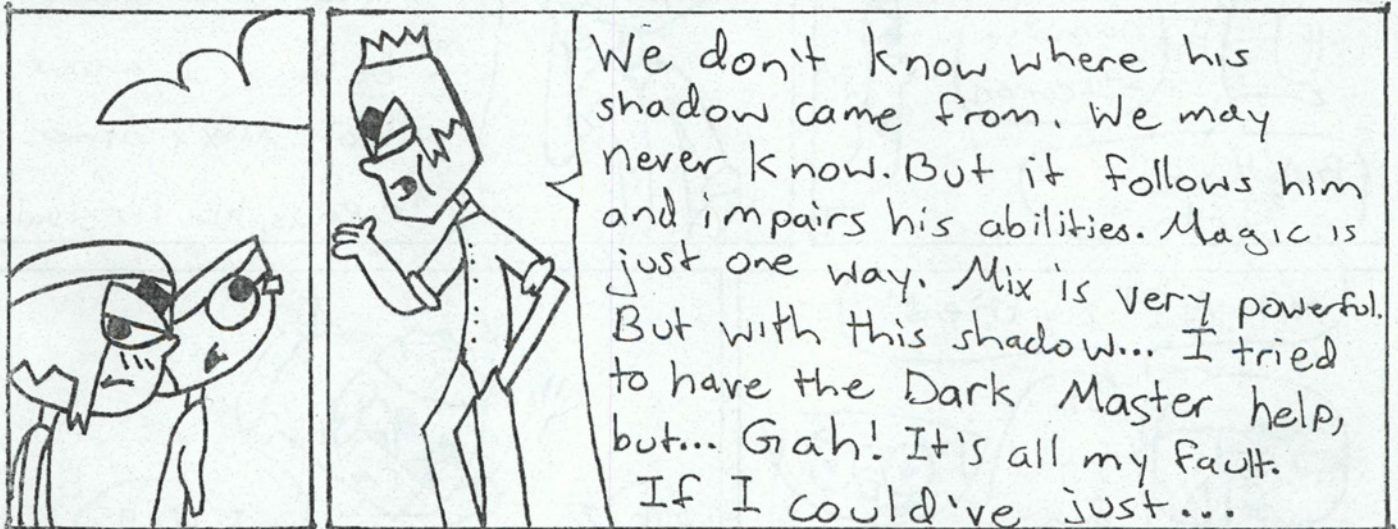
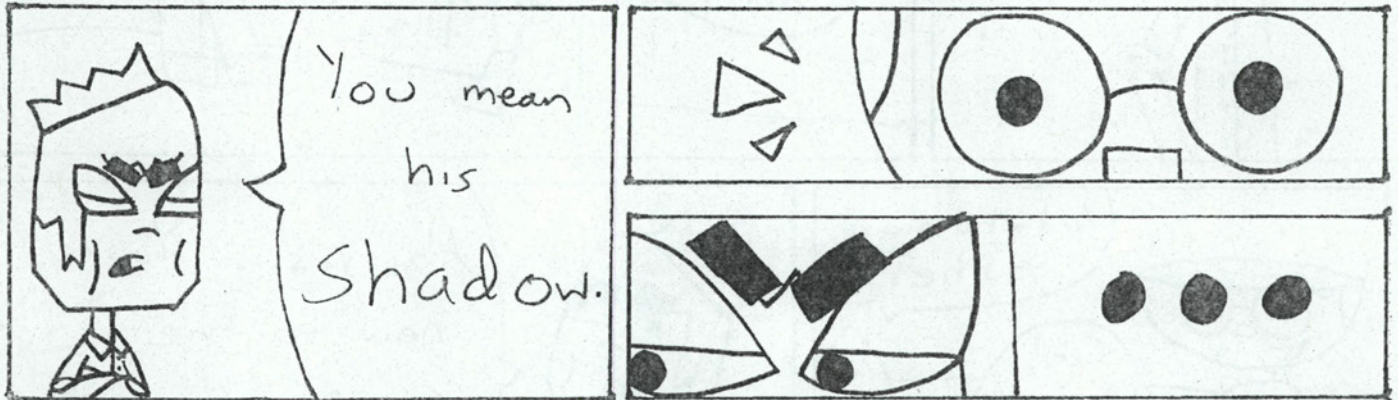
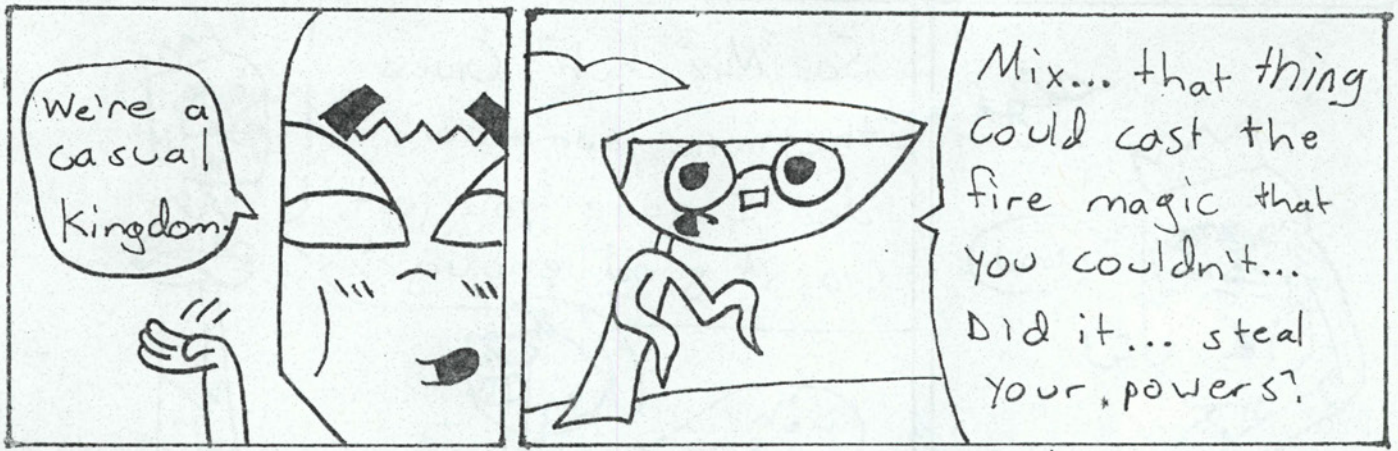




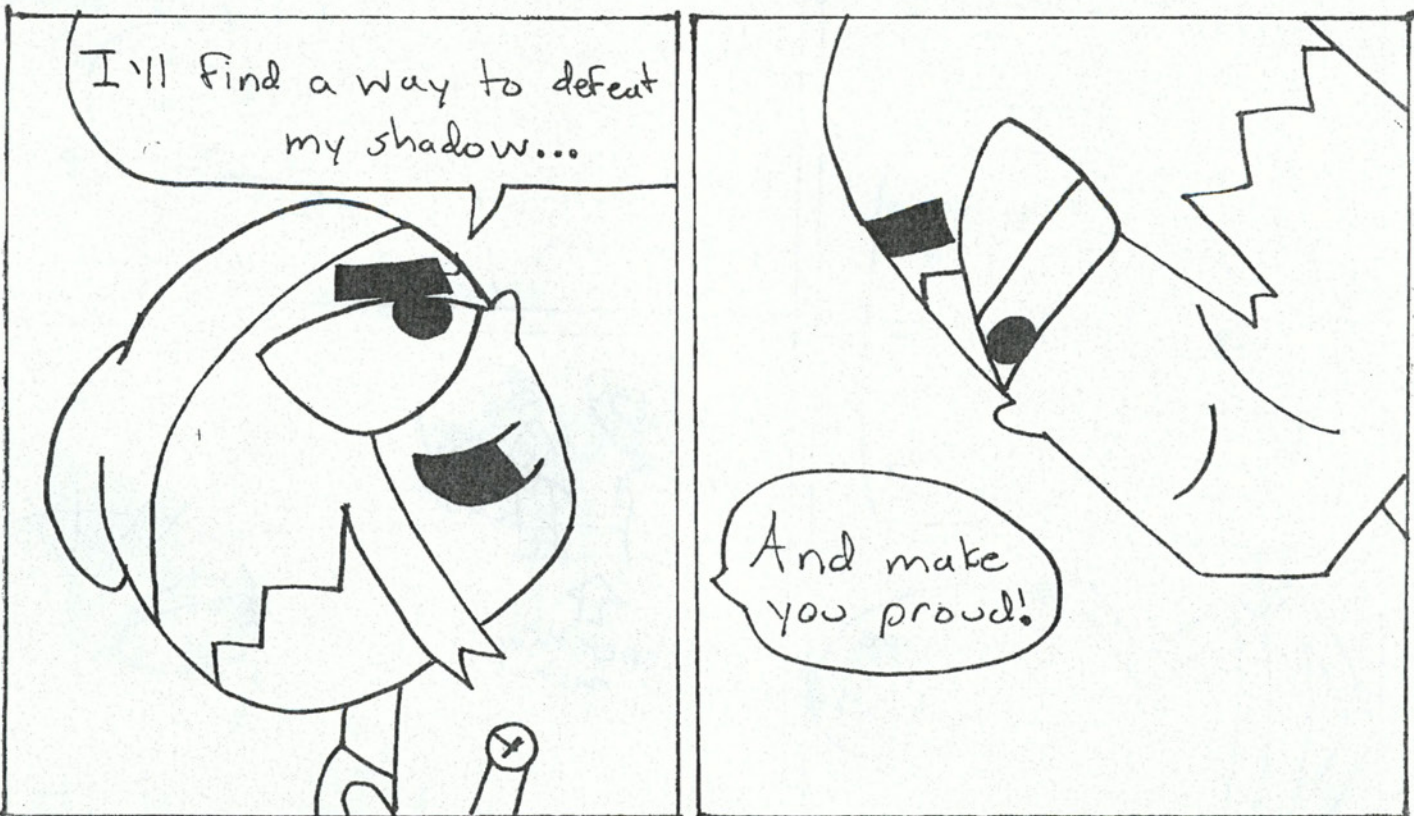
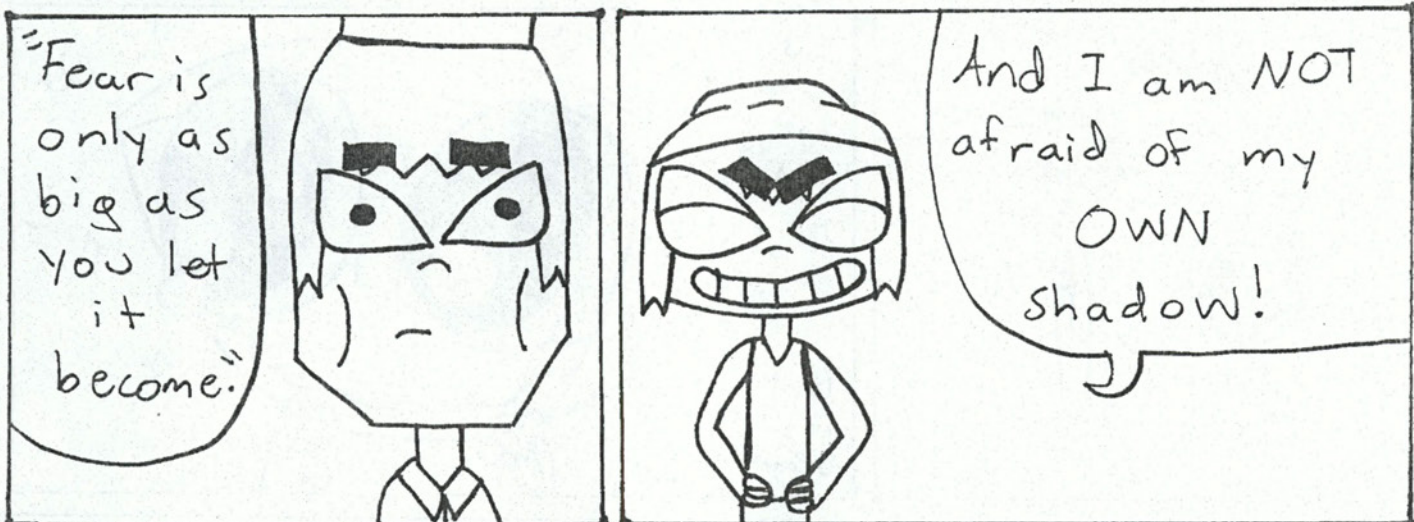
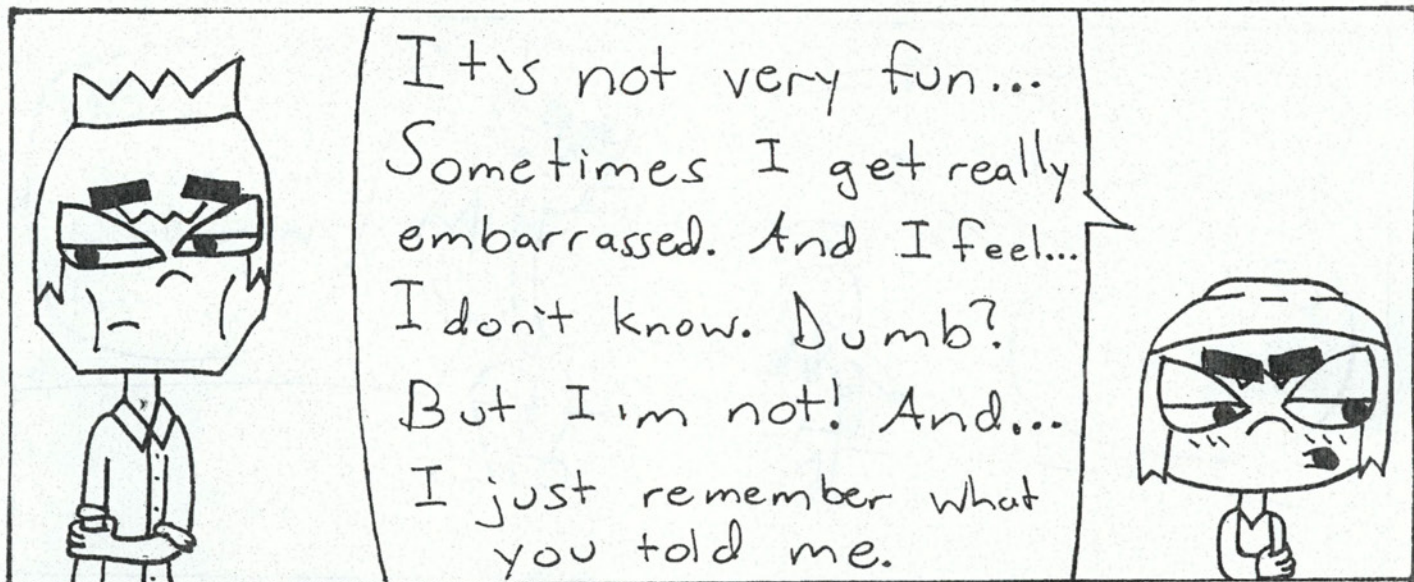




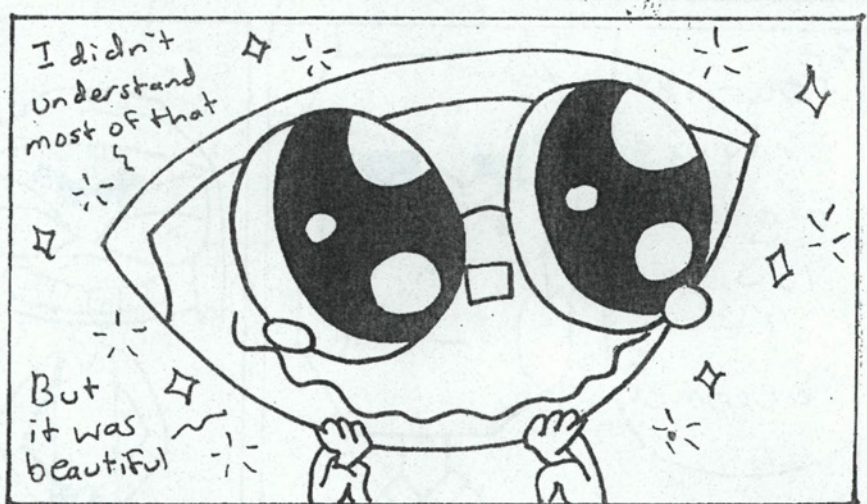




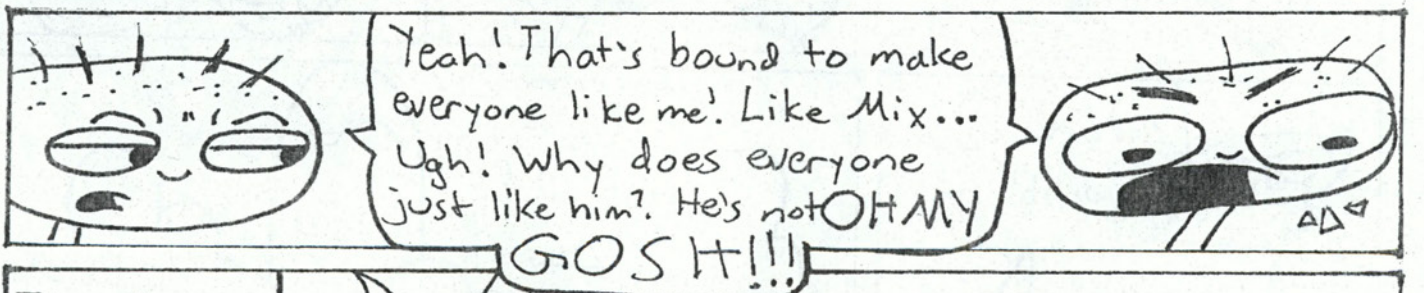
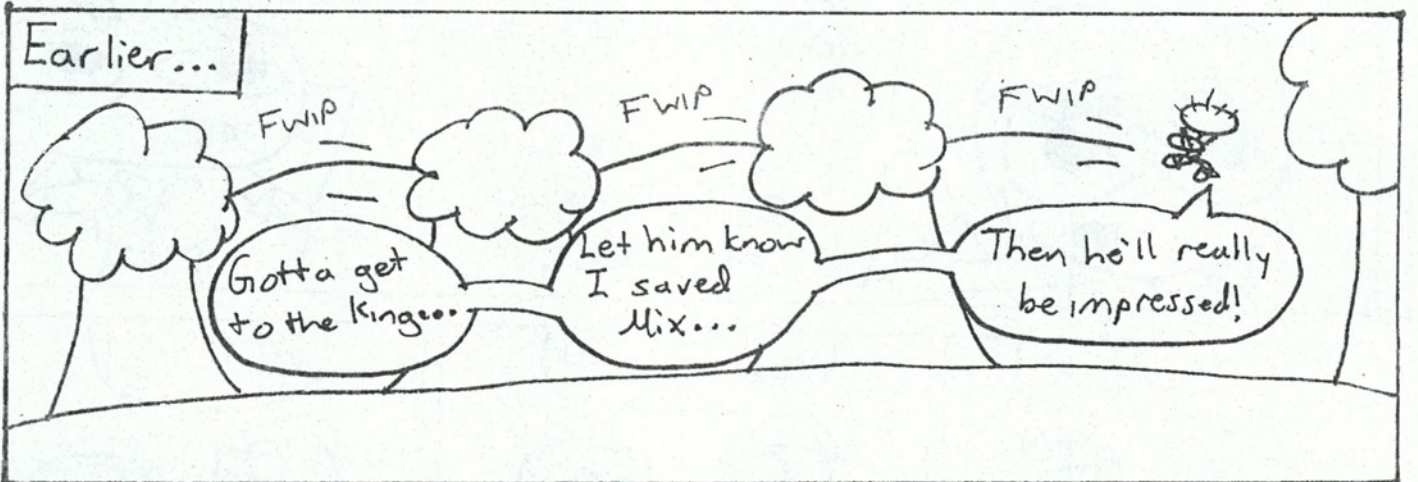














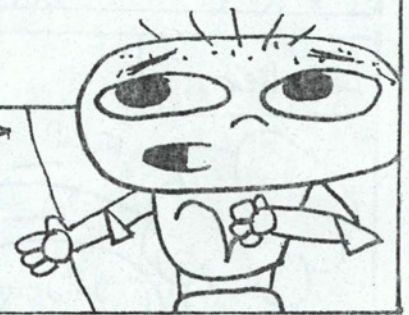
Back to the present



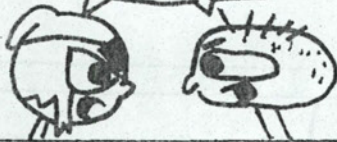
Well, all that matters  
is you're back now!  
And that means you  
can help Mix and  
Icky get up Death  
Mountain to the Dark Master!



WHAT?! No! I can  
defeat the Dark  
Master on my  
own! He's only  
going to slow  
me down!



No I won't!



Yes you will!



BOYS!



Quit your  
squabbling!

I don't  
know, it  
was kind  
of impressive

Quiet, 7  
Icky

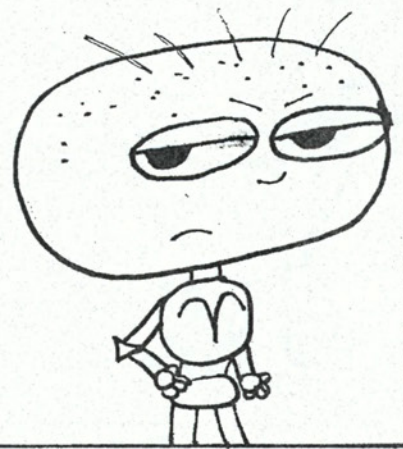


It will take all  
three of you to  
stop the Dark  
Master.

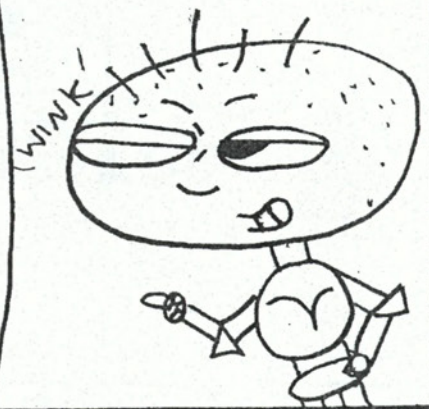




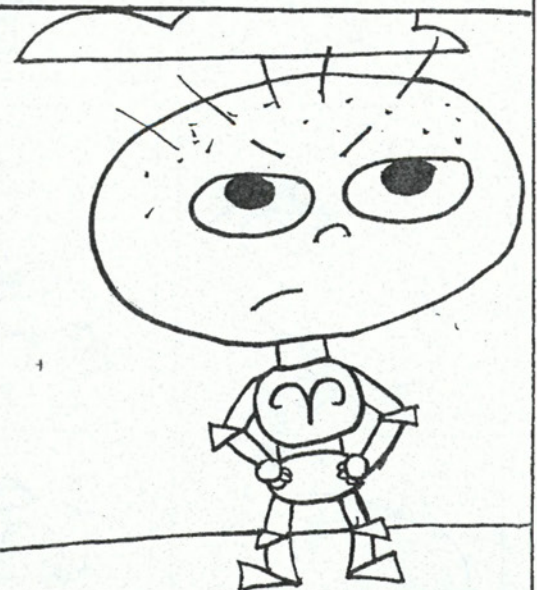
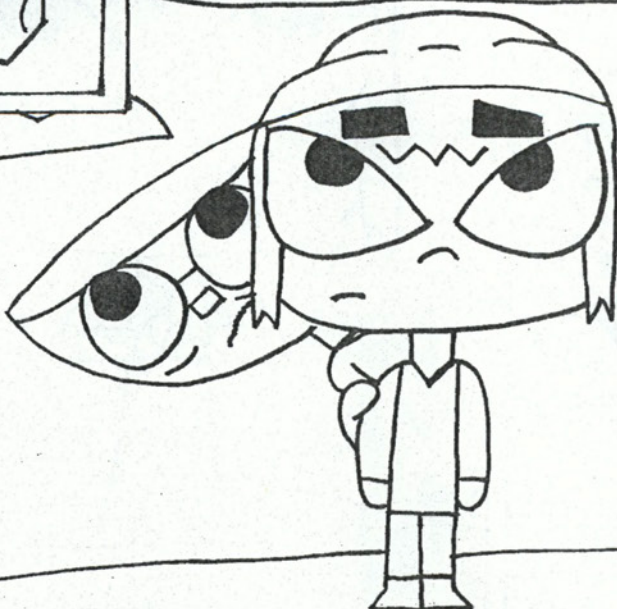
Yes, Mix, this is your fight. Only you can defeat the Dark Master and get rid of your shadow. No one else can do that.



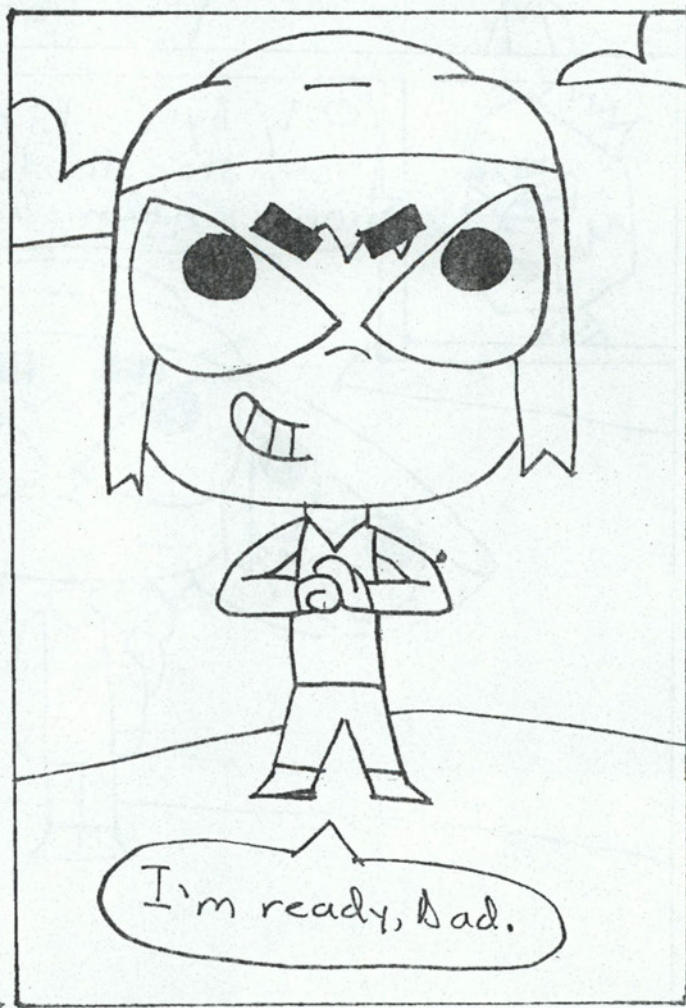
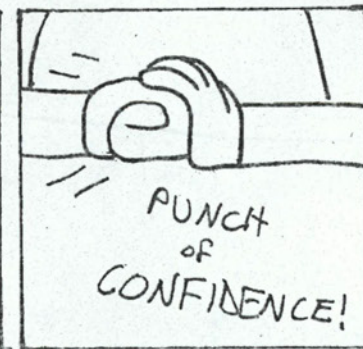
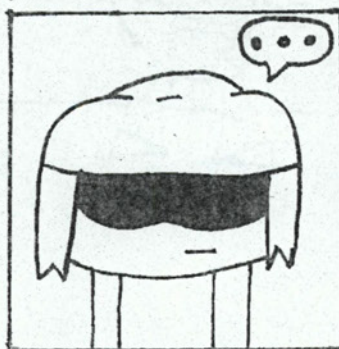
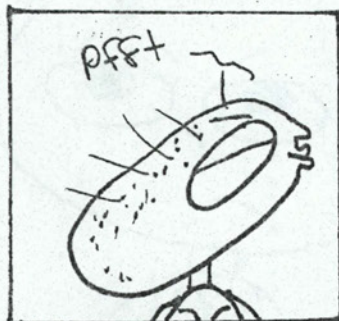
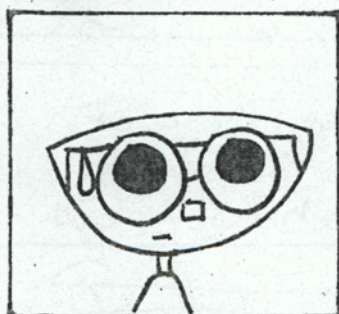
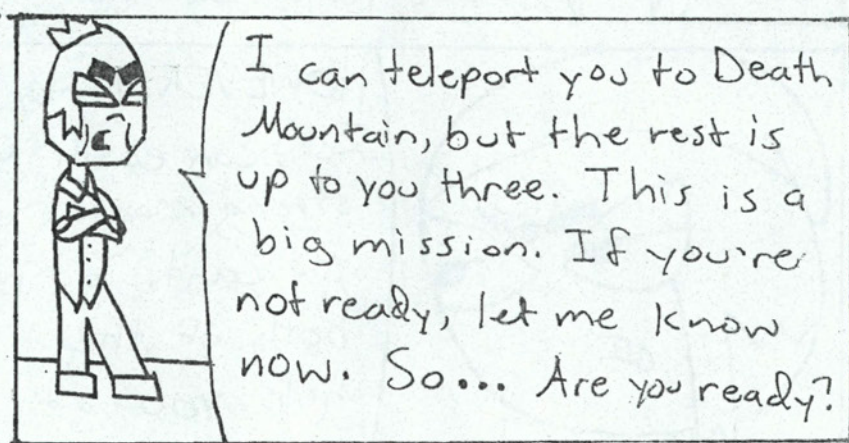
HOWEVER. Percy and Icky can easily use strong magic, which you can't. You need both of them to help you get to the Dark Master.



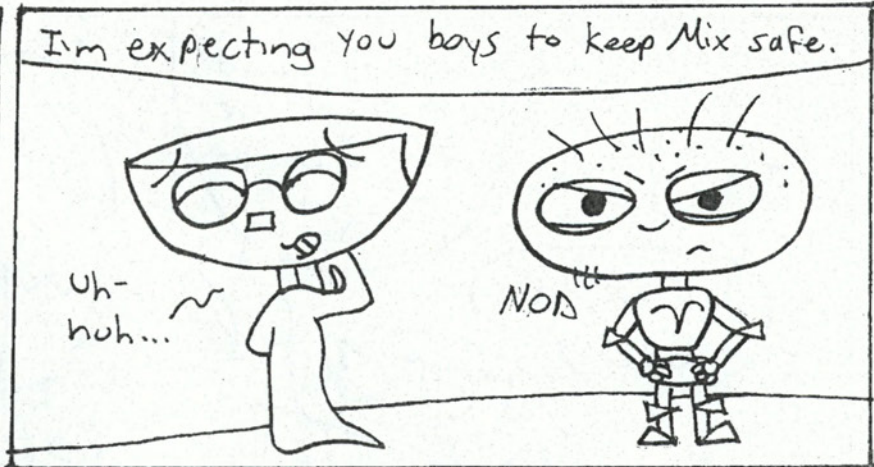
Only by working together can the three of you stop the Dark Master from tormenting our kingdom and free Mix from his shadow.



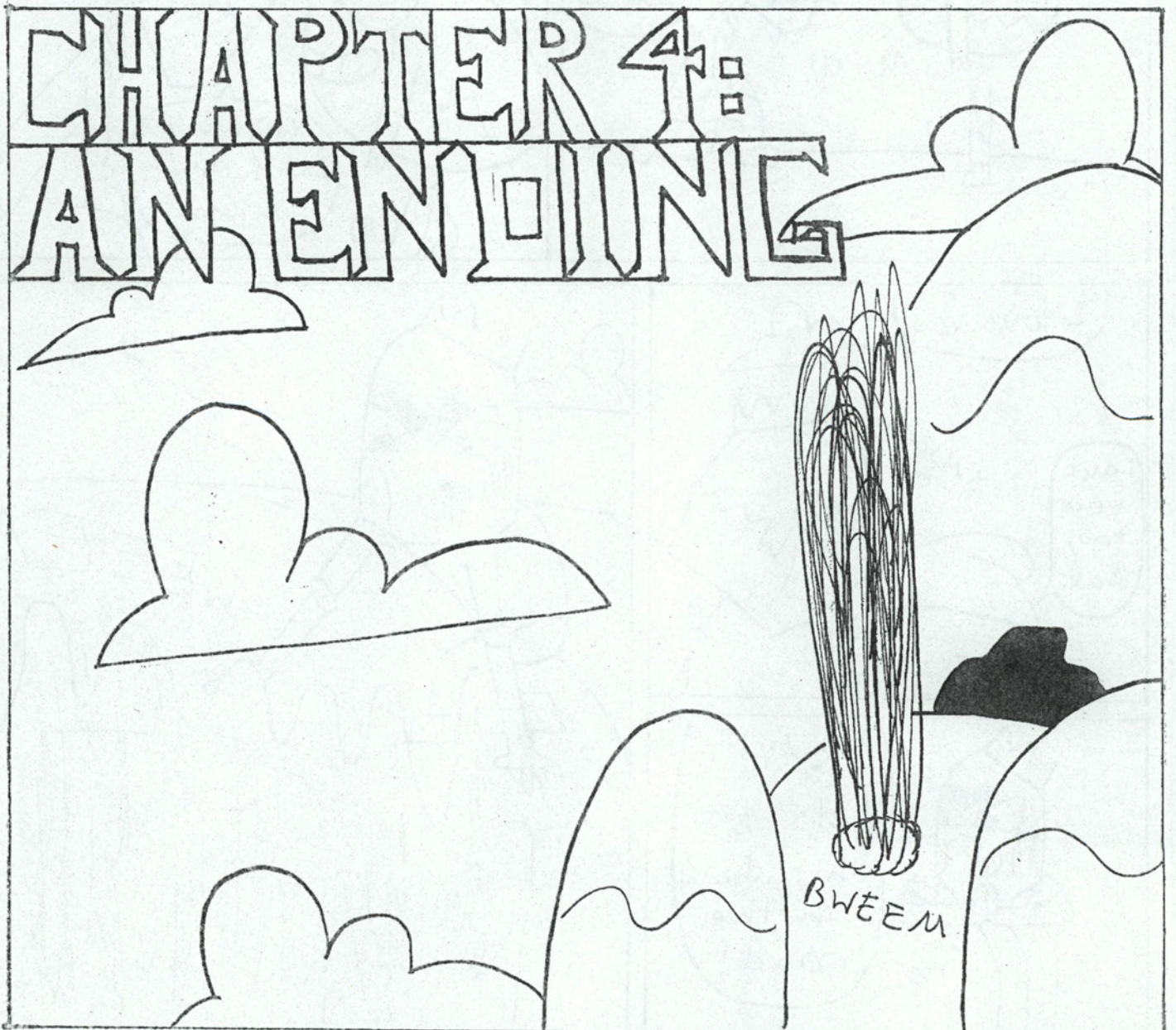




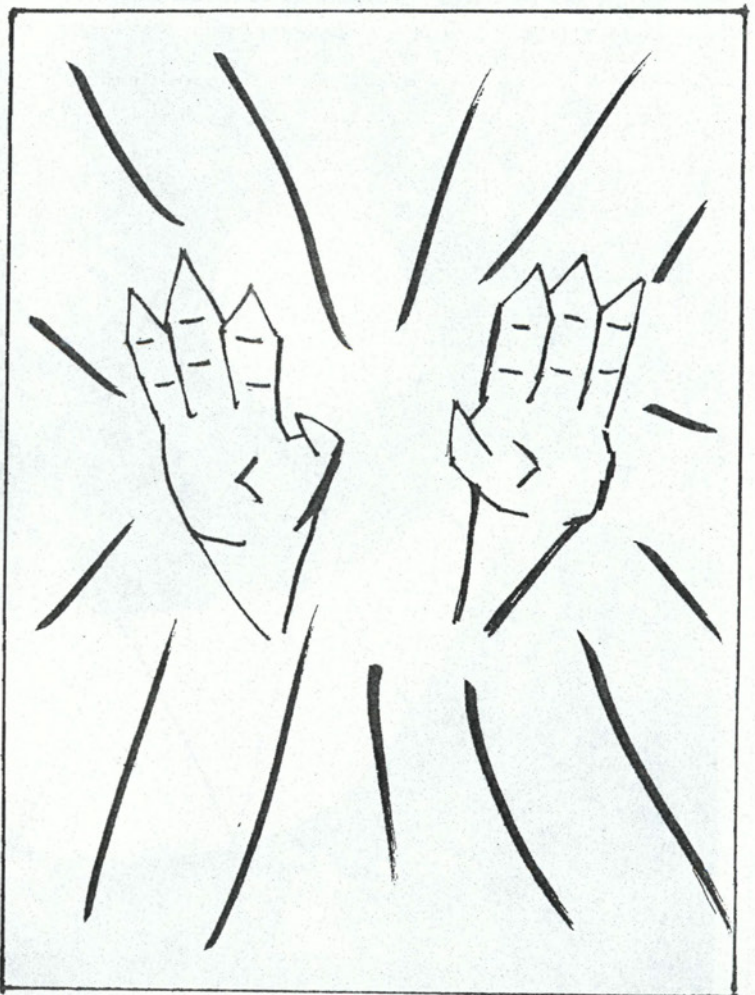
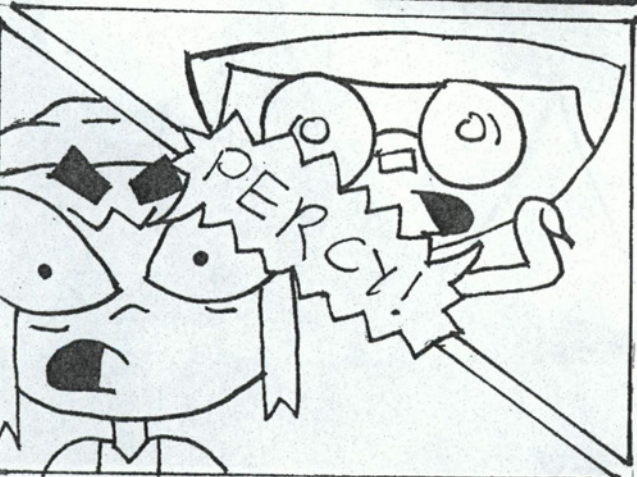
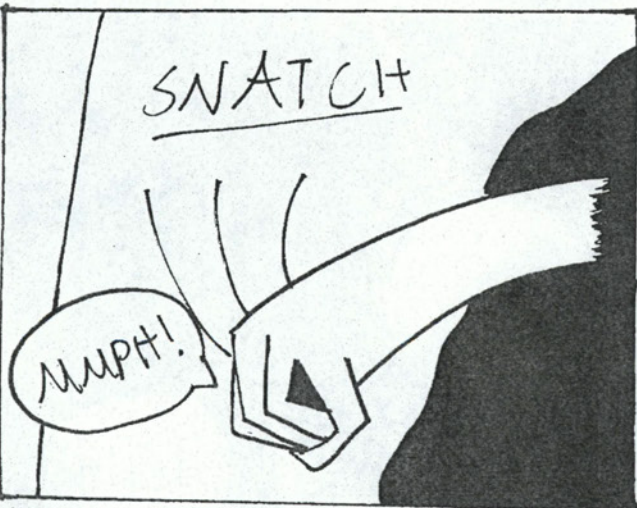




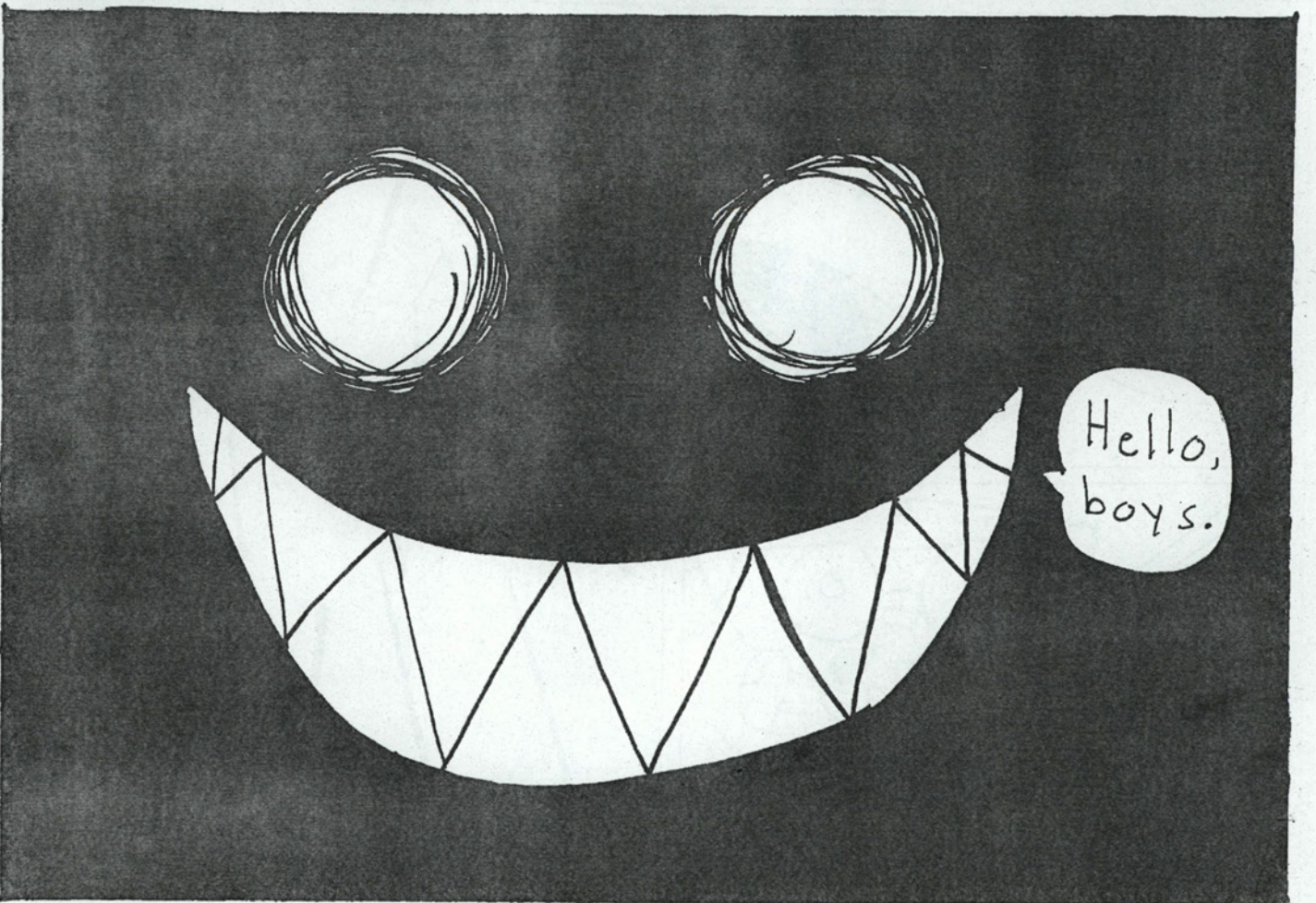
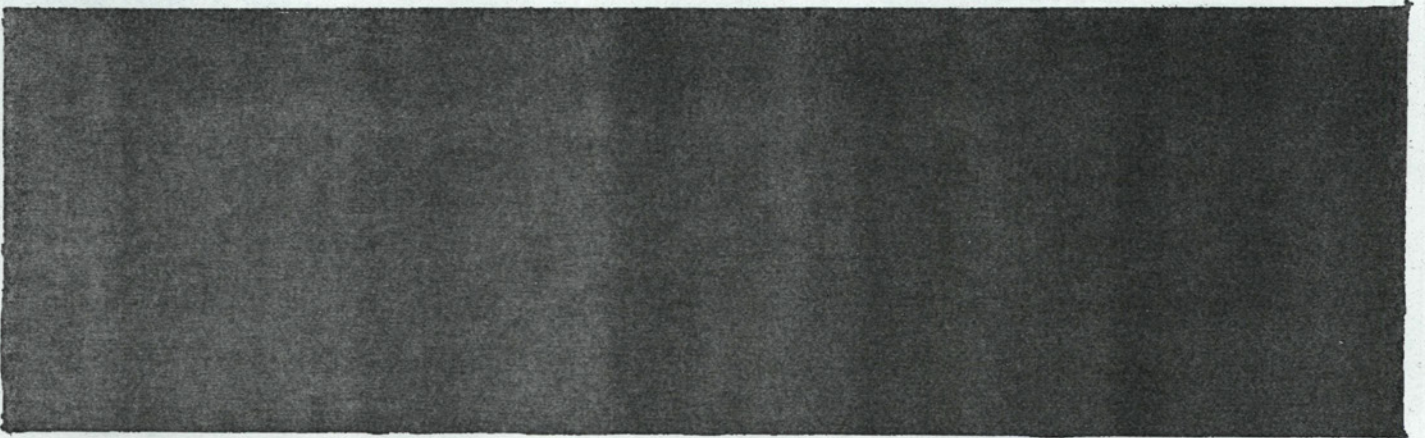
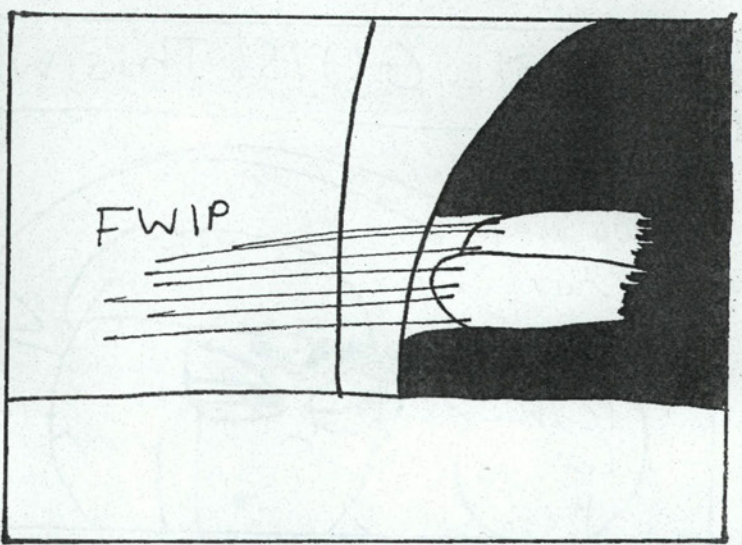
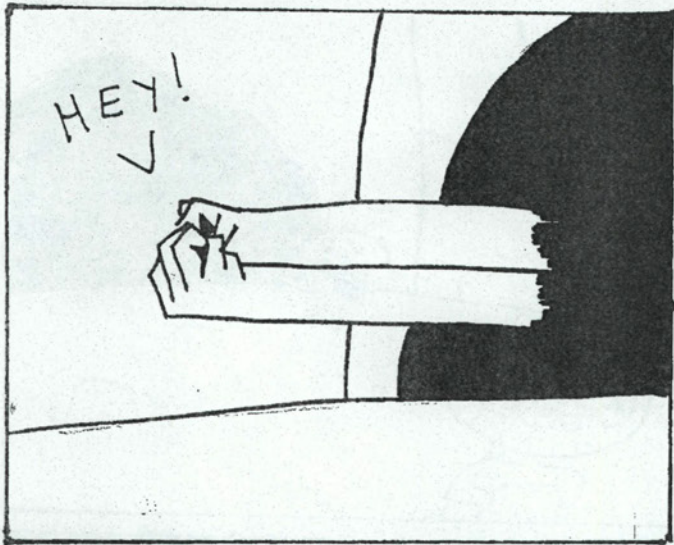




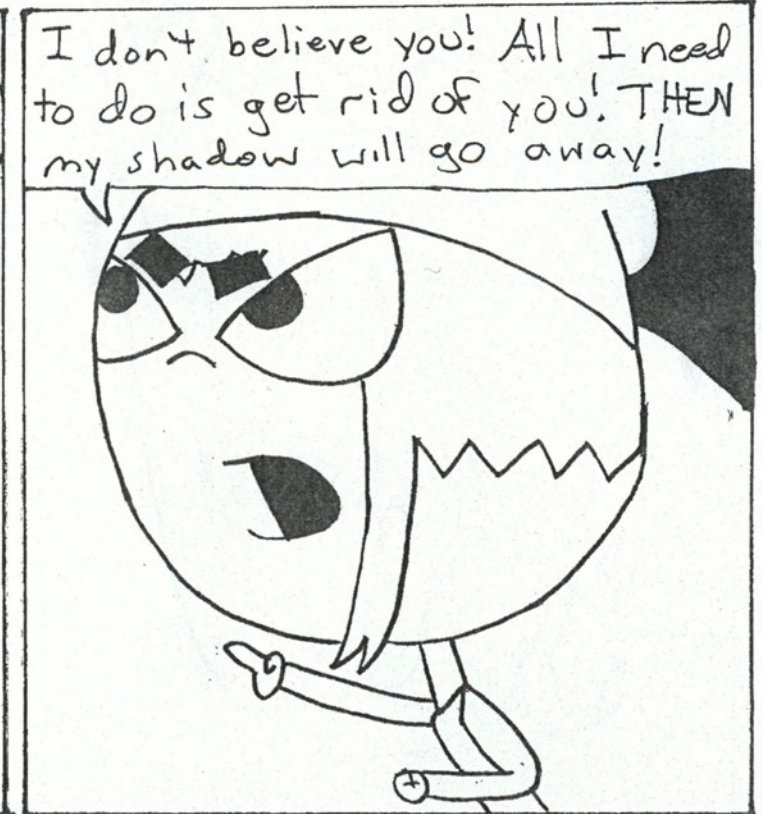
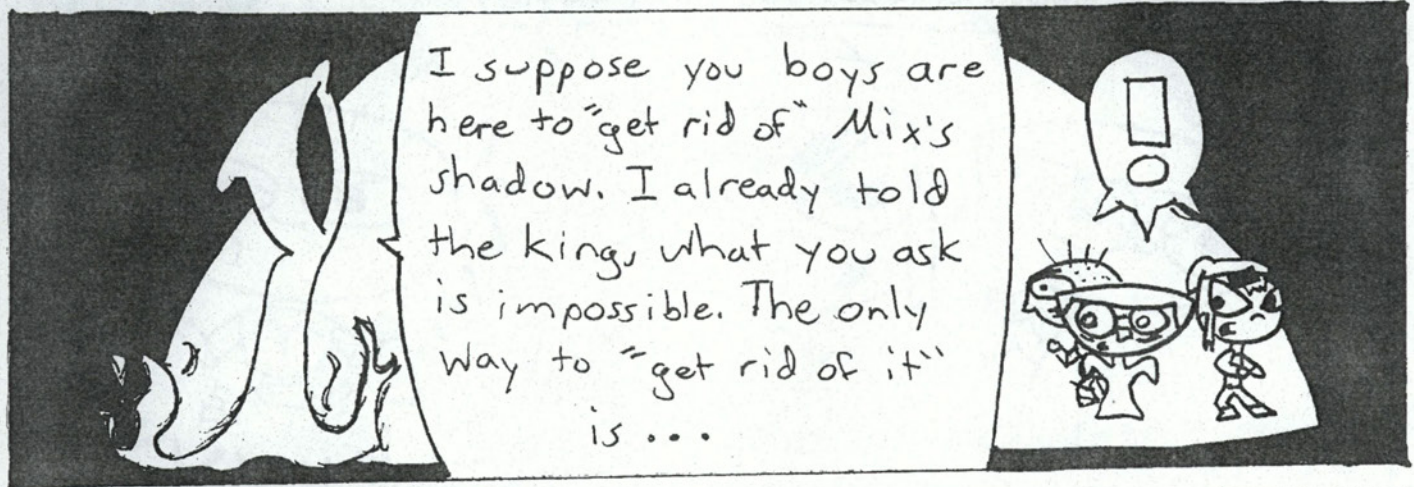
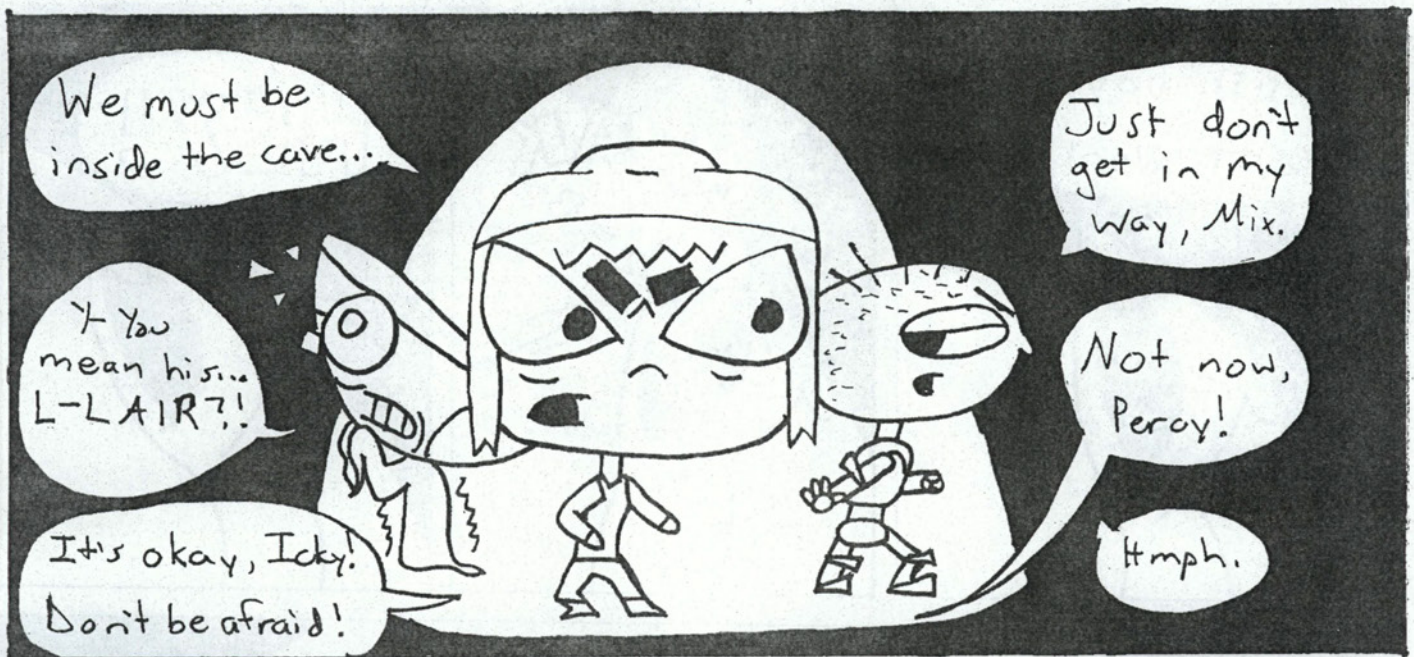




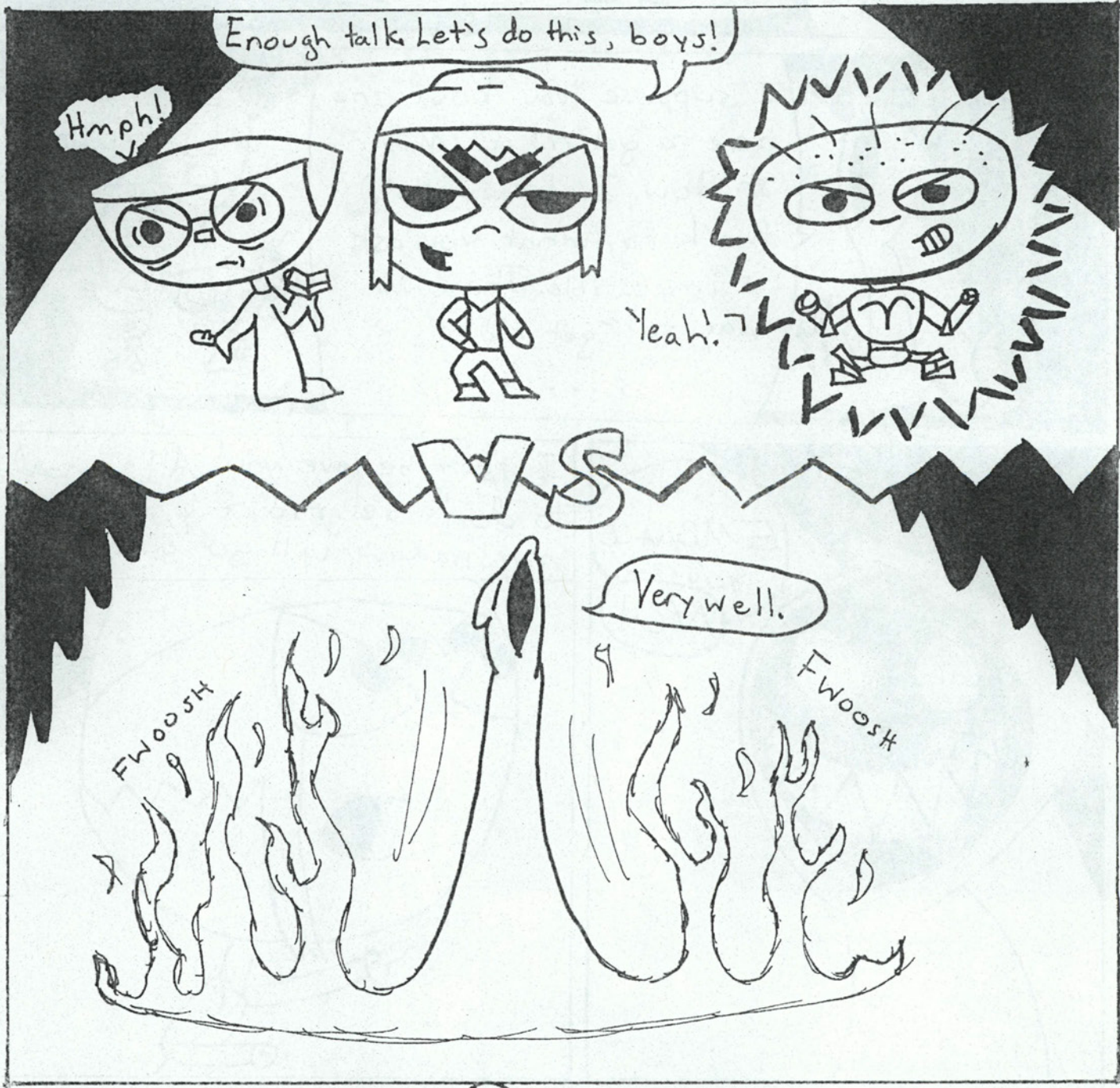




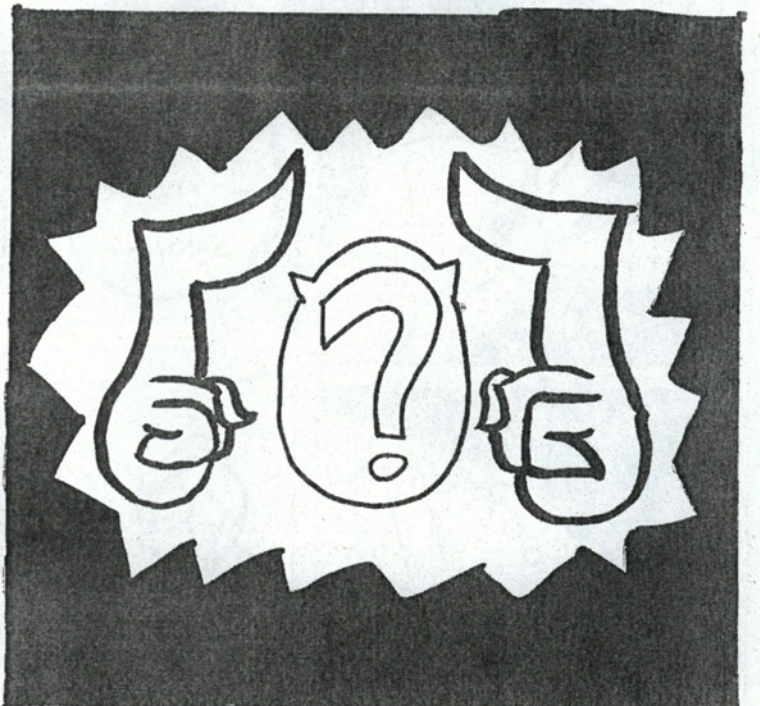
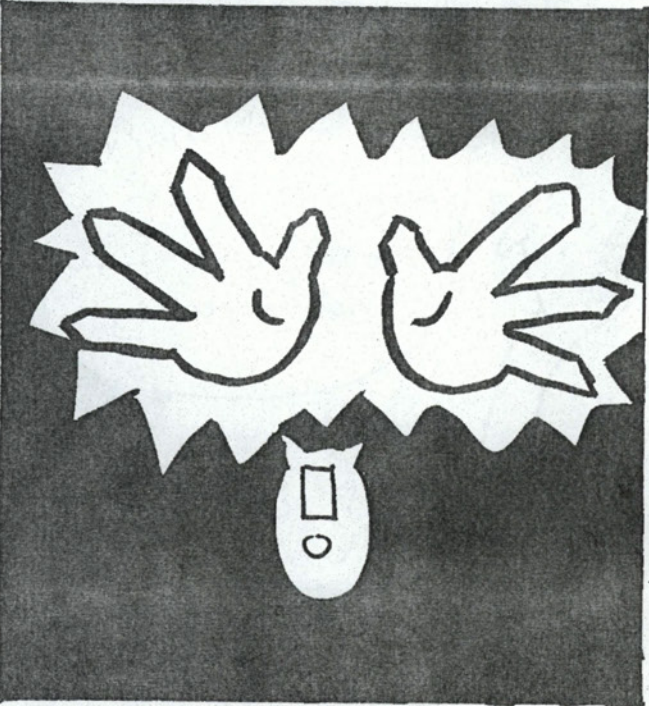
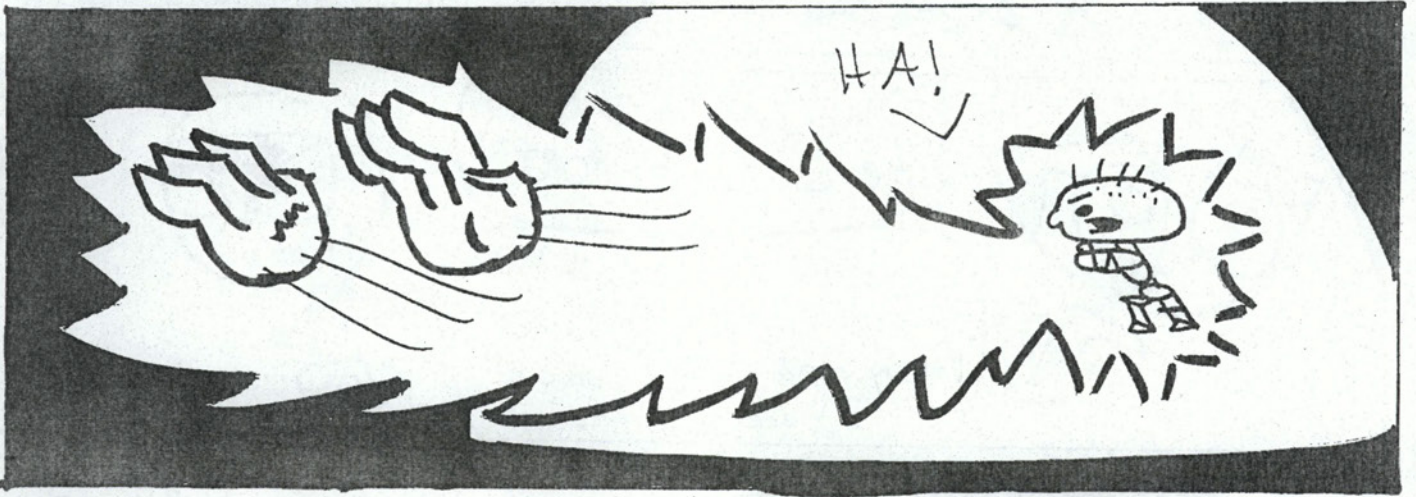
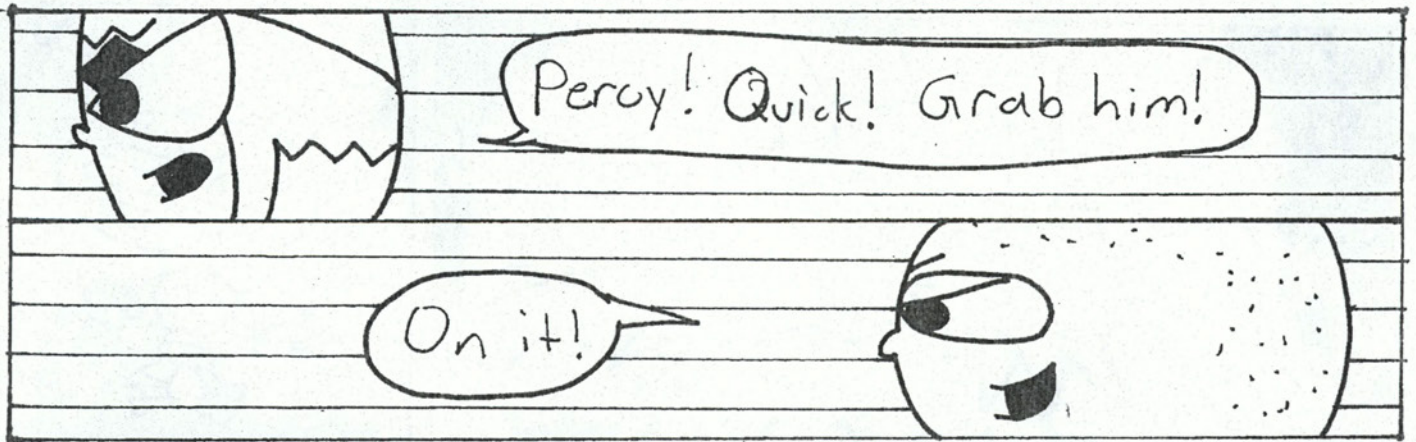




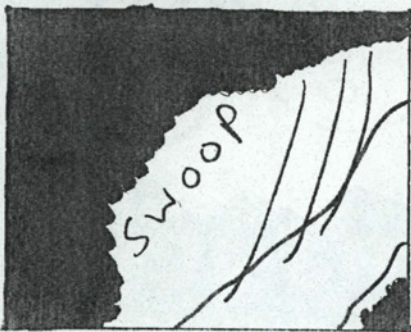
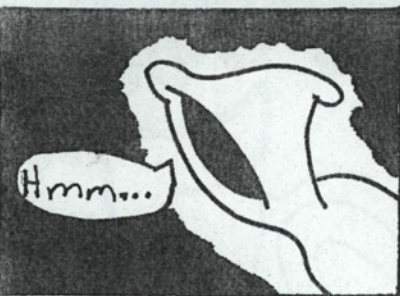
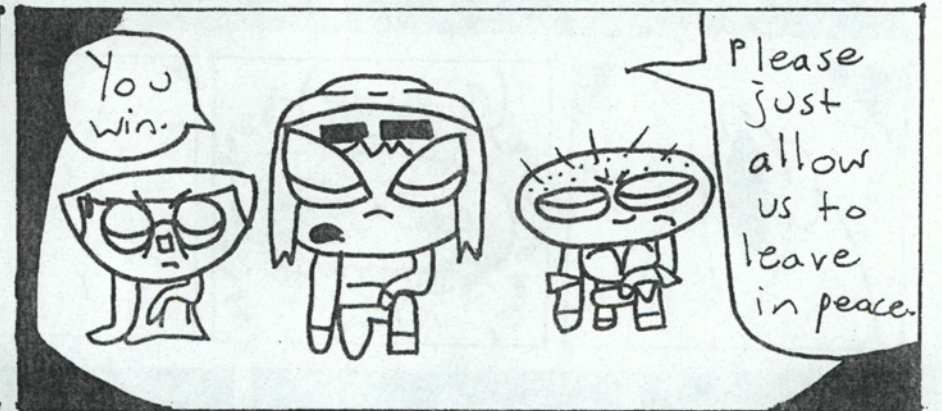
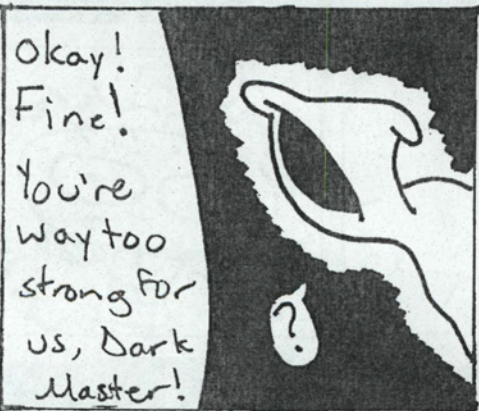
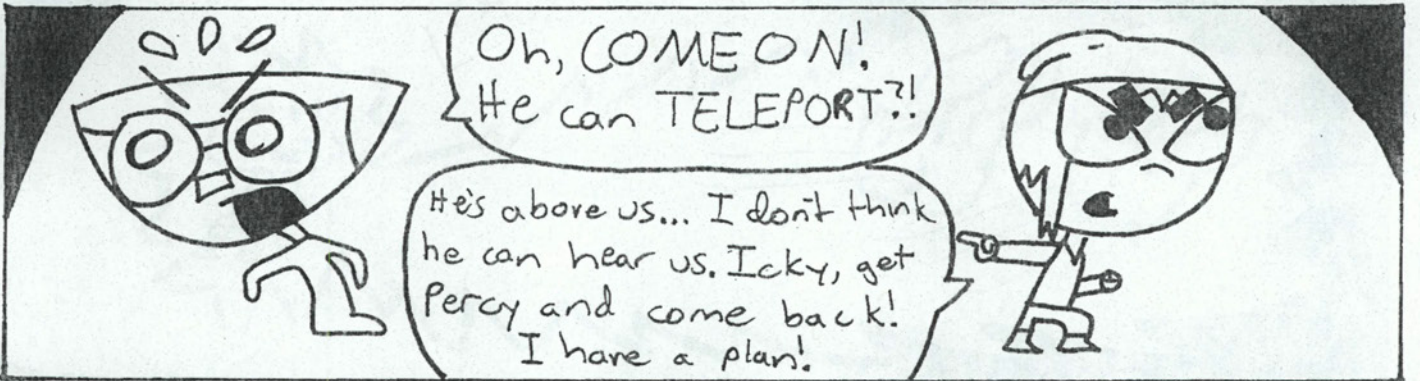
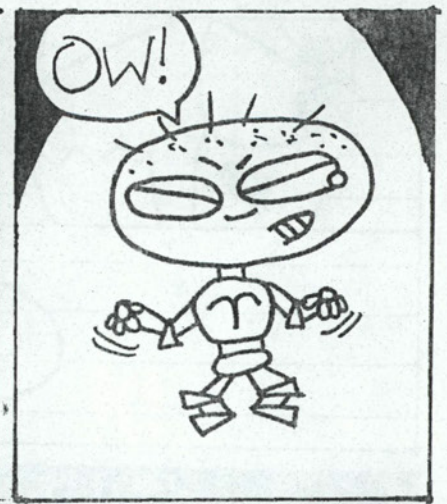
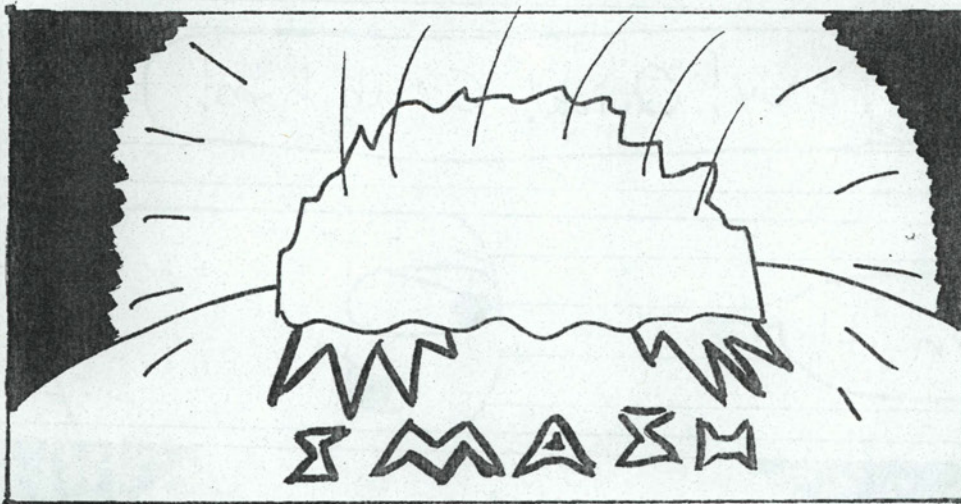




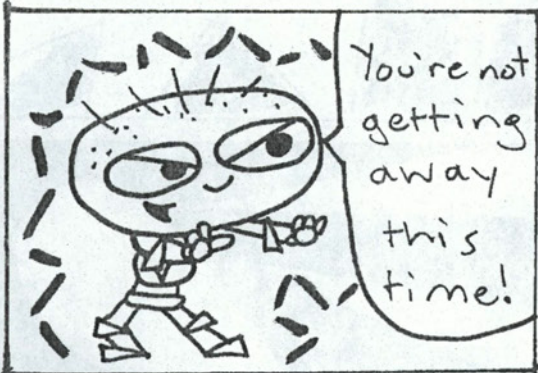
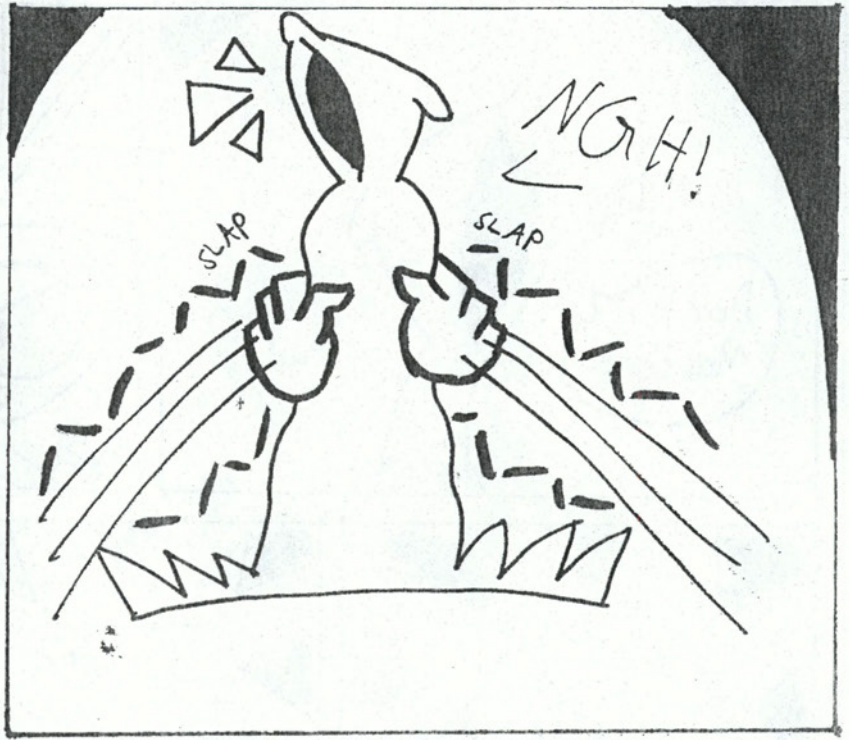




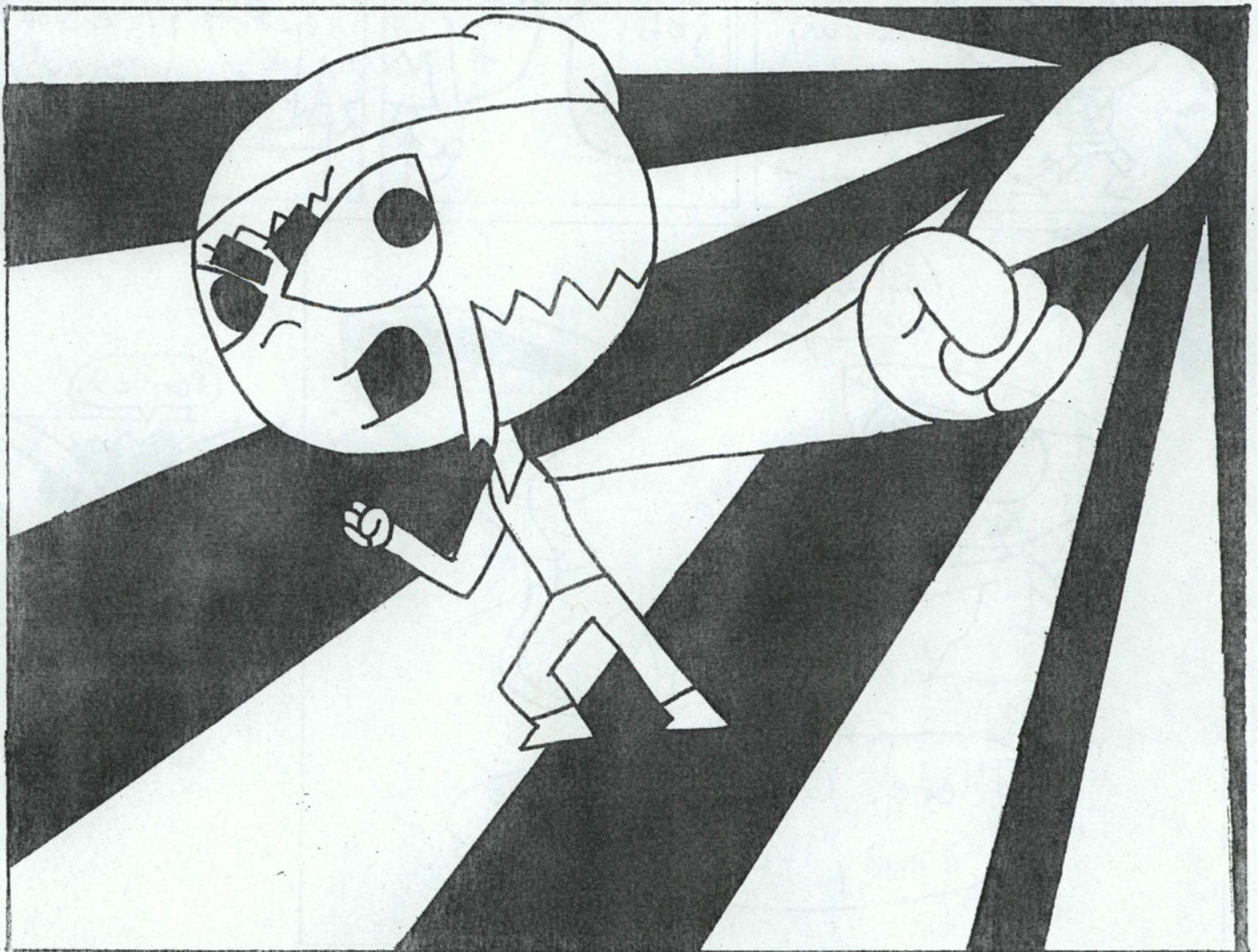
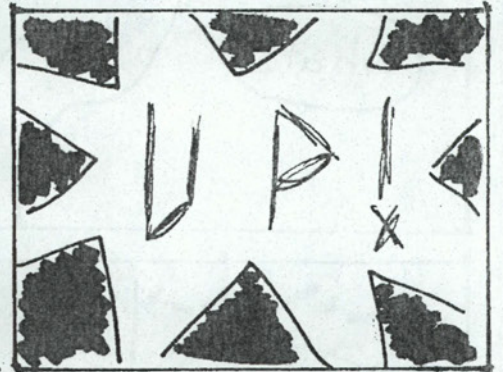
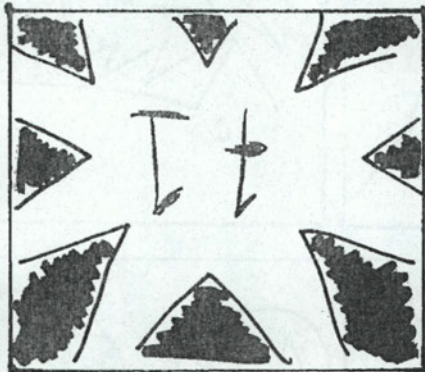
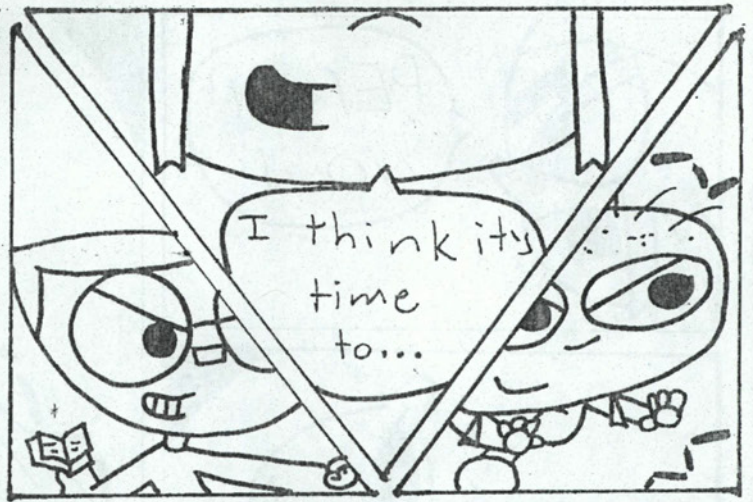
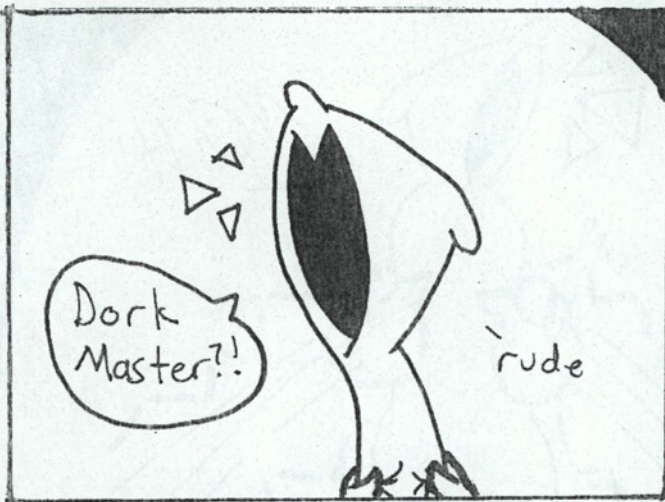






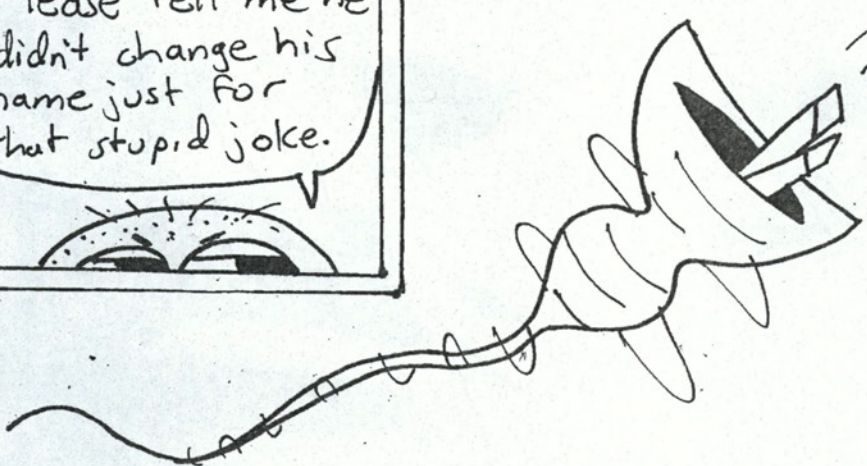




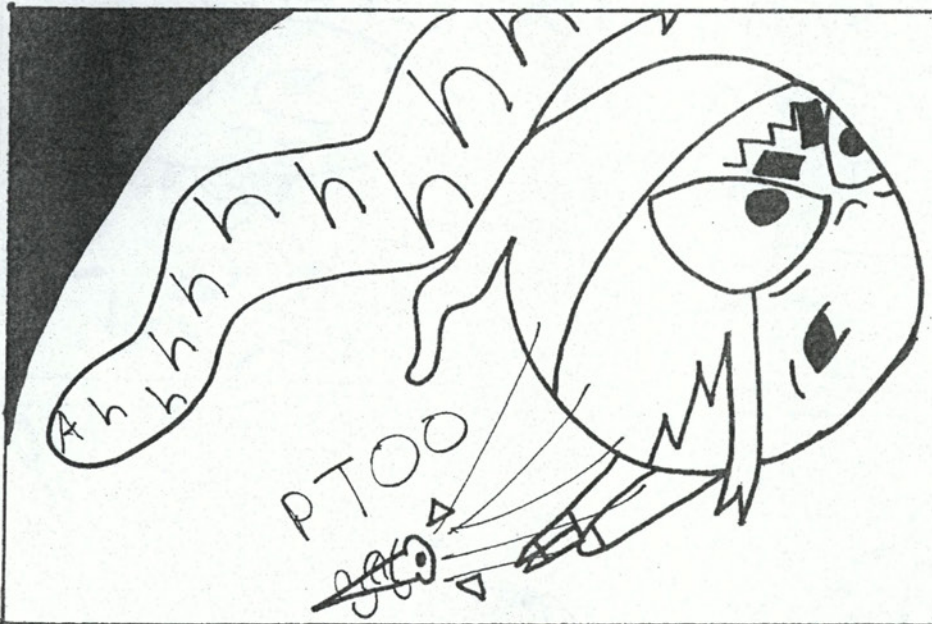
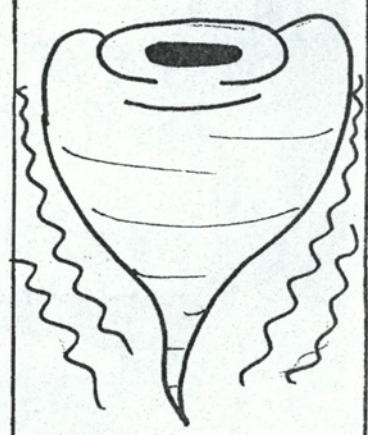




Please tell me he  
didn't change his  
name just for  
that stupid joke.

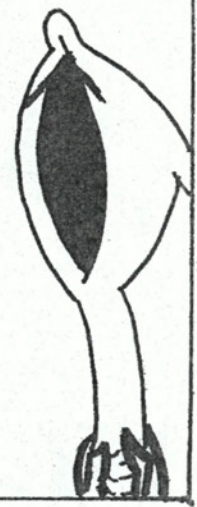


SSSLURP

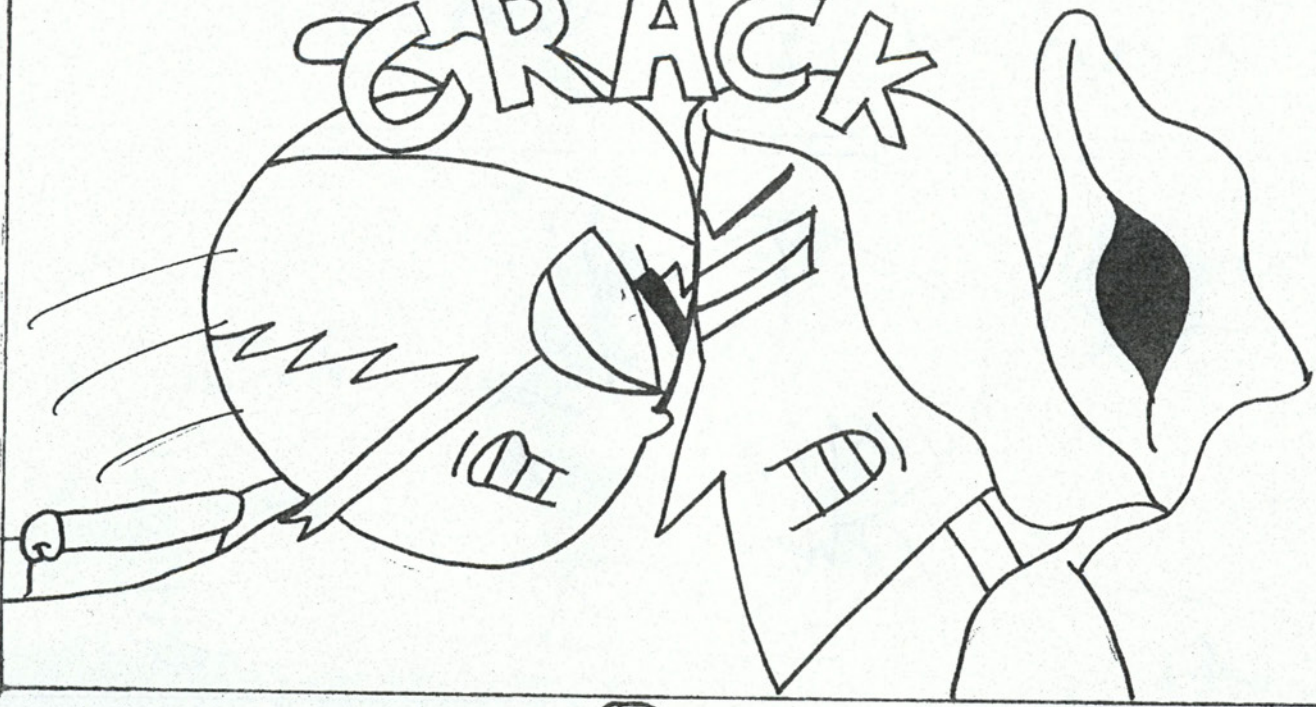


PTOO

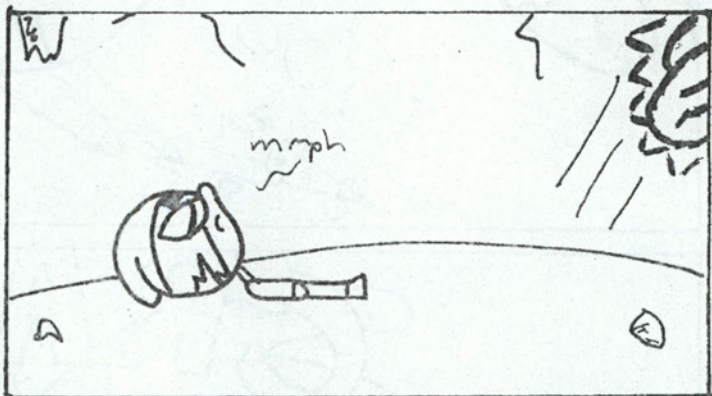
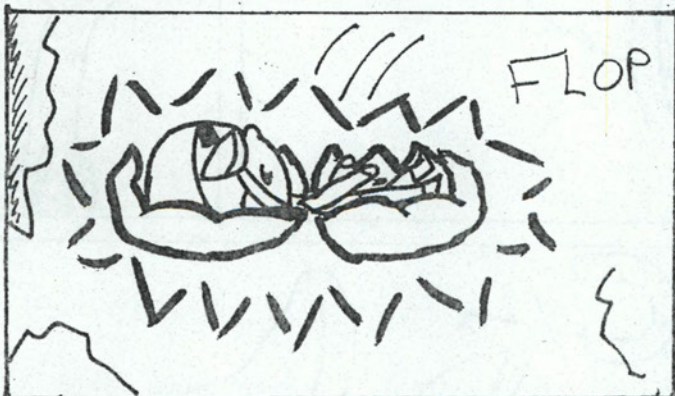
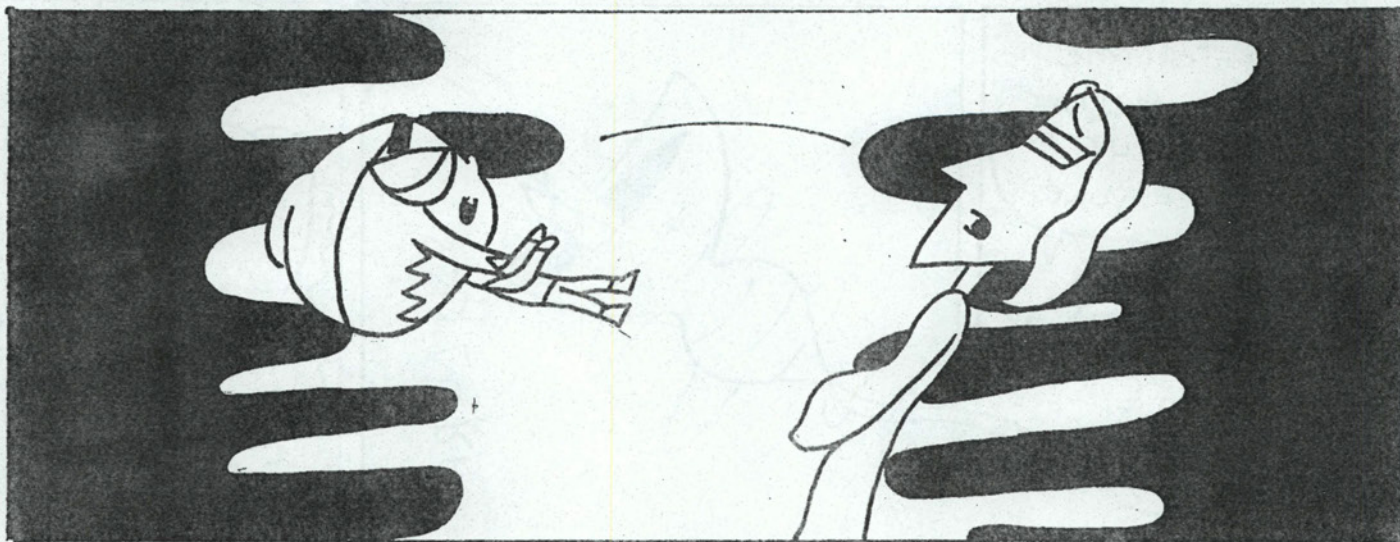
Oh  
no.



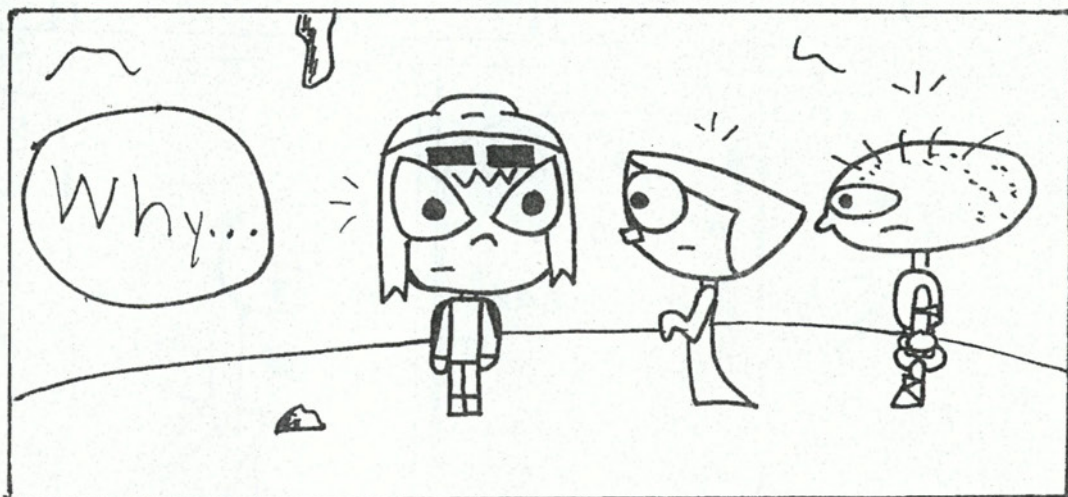
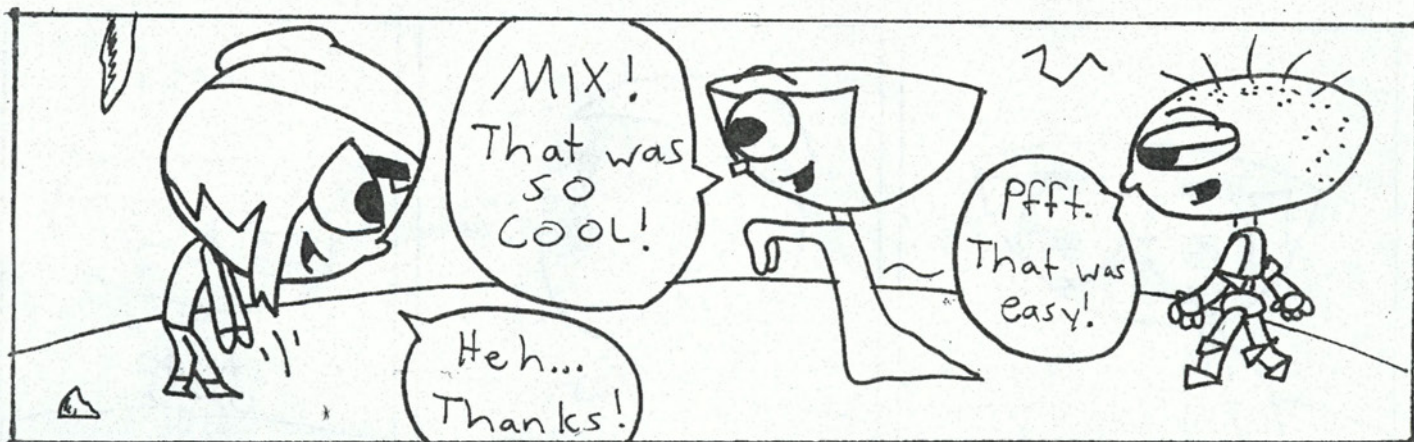
GRACK



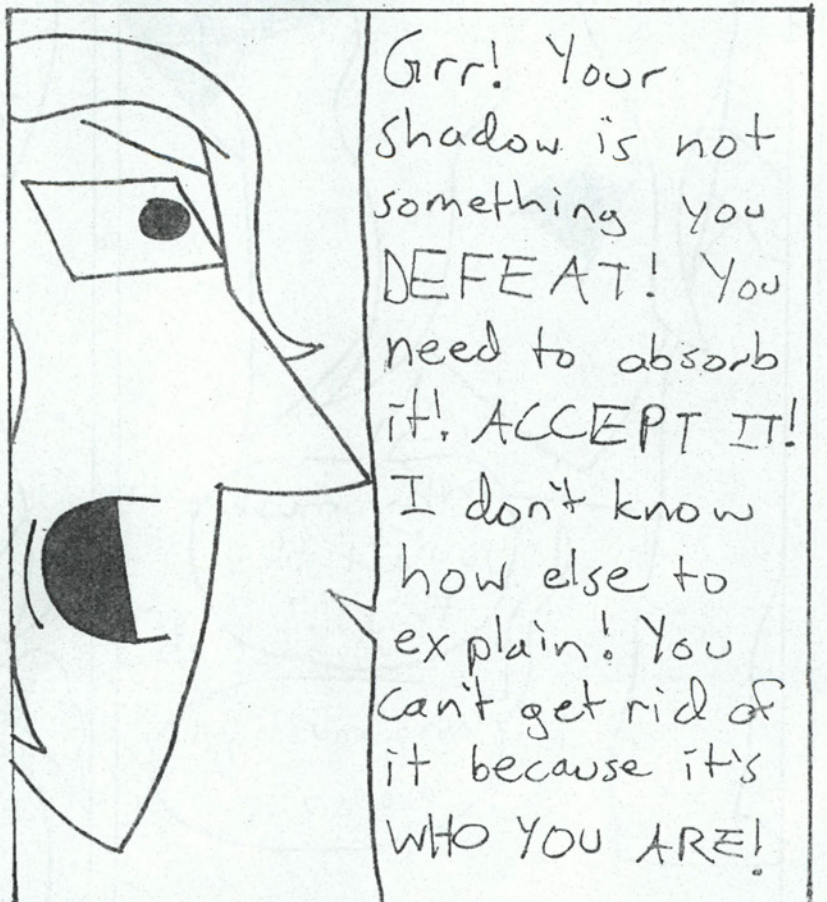
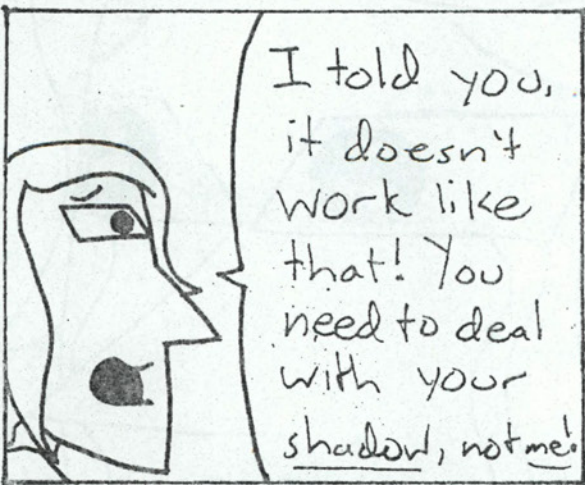
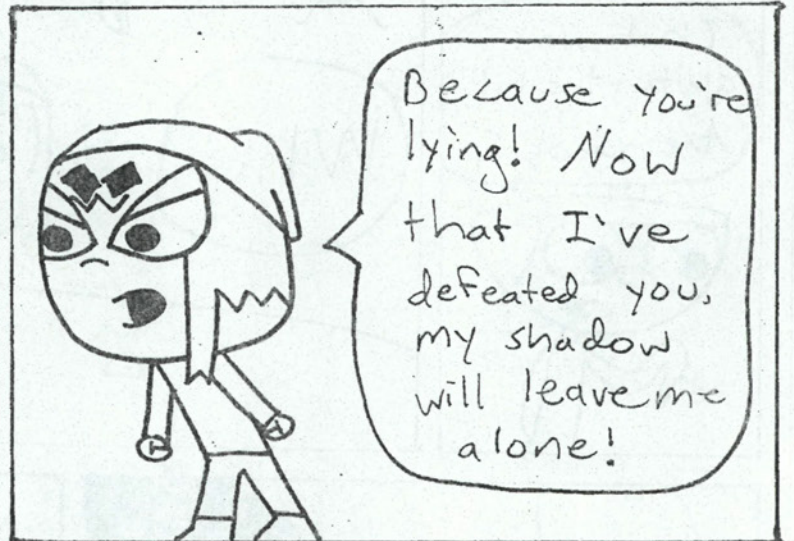
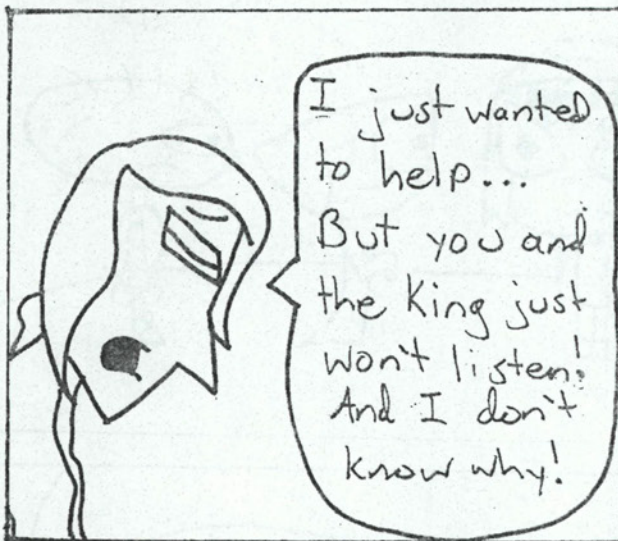
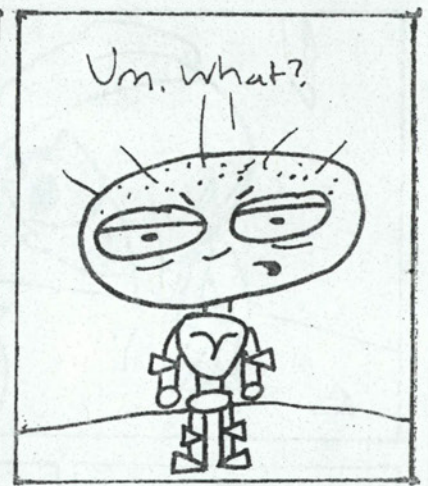




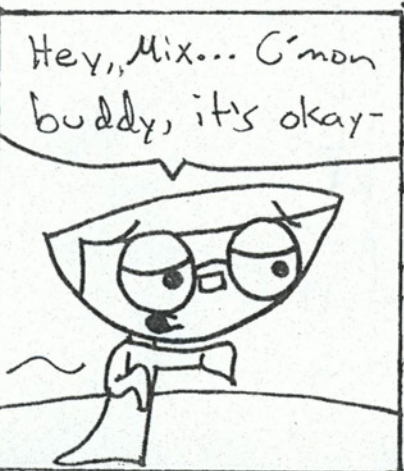
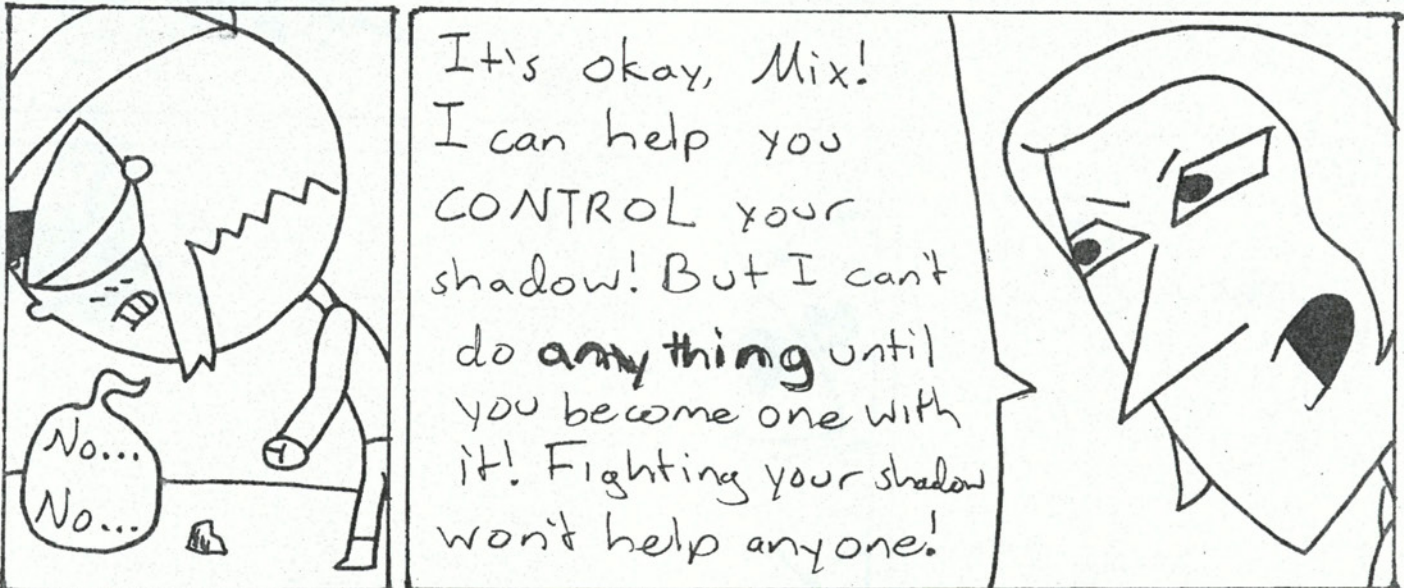
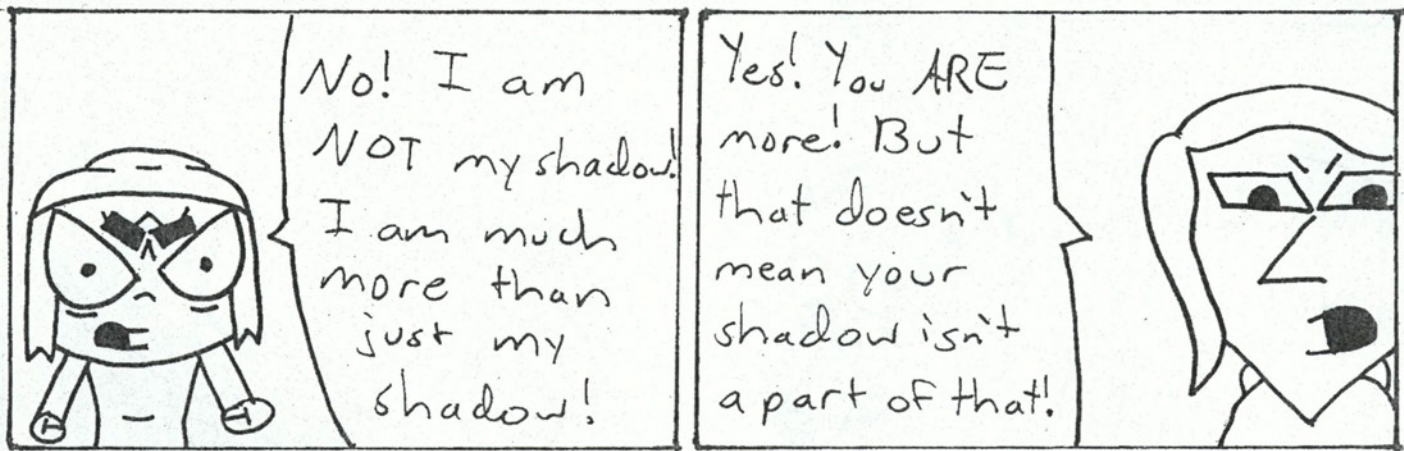








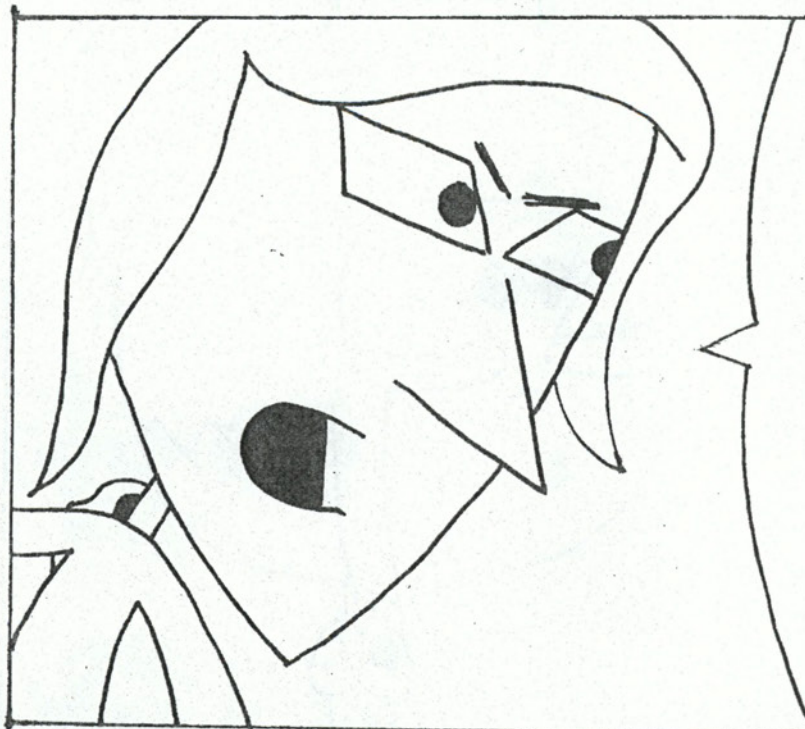
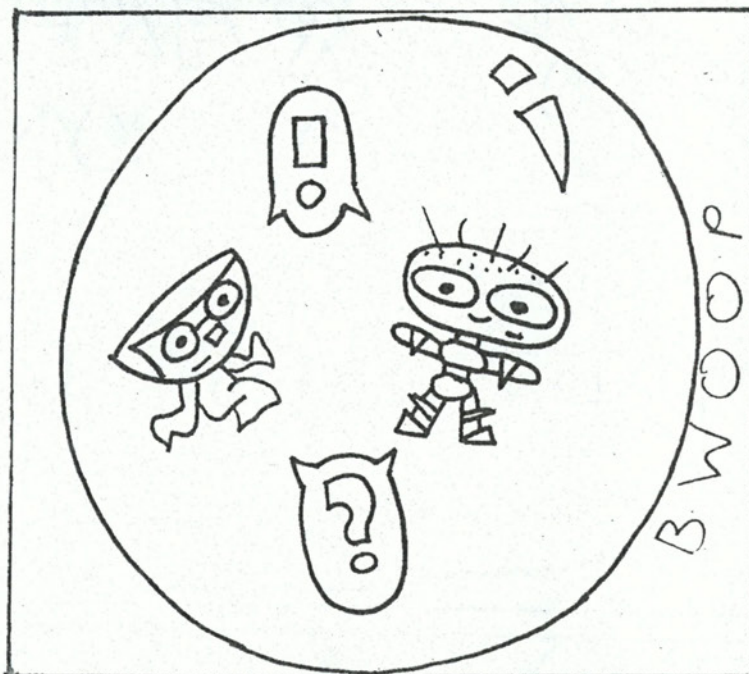






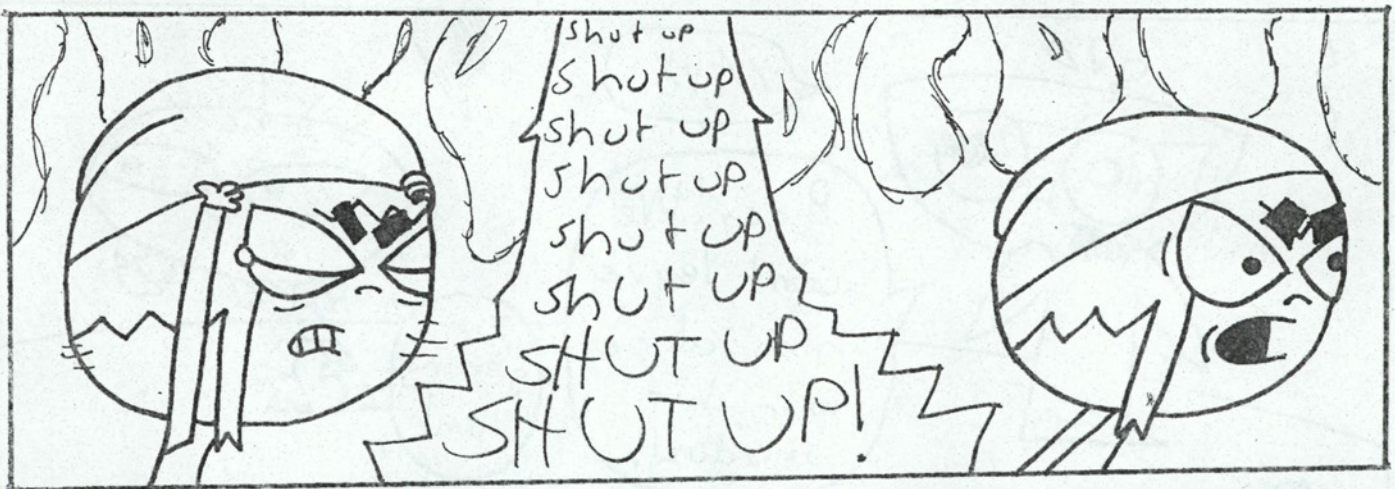




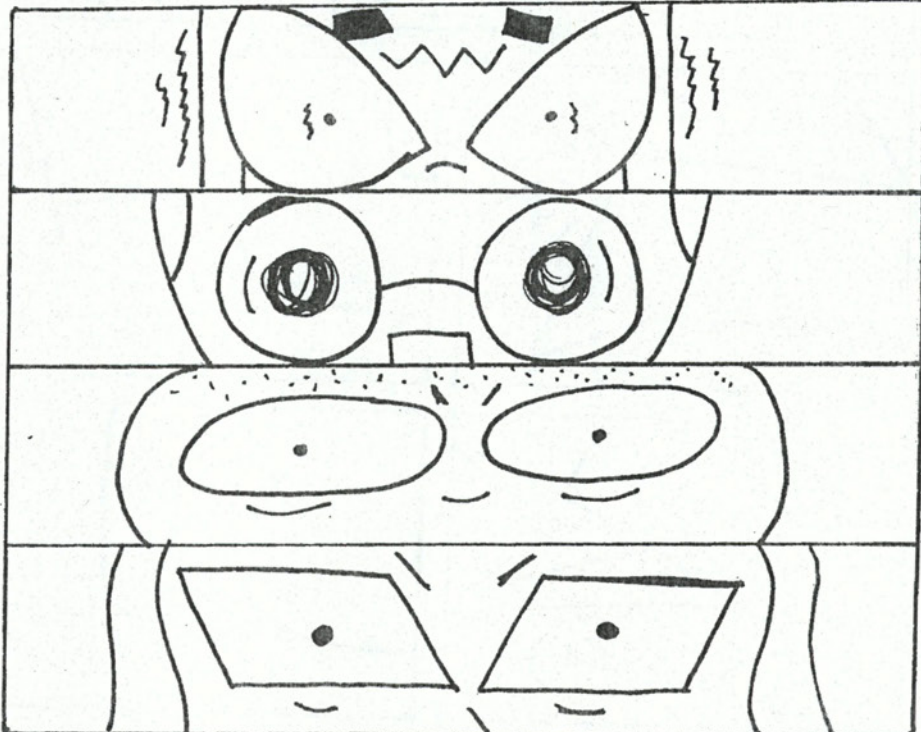
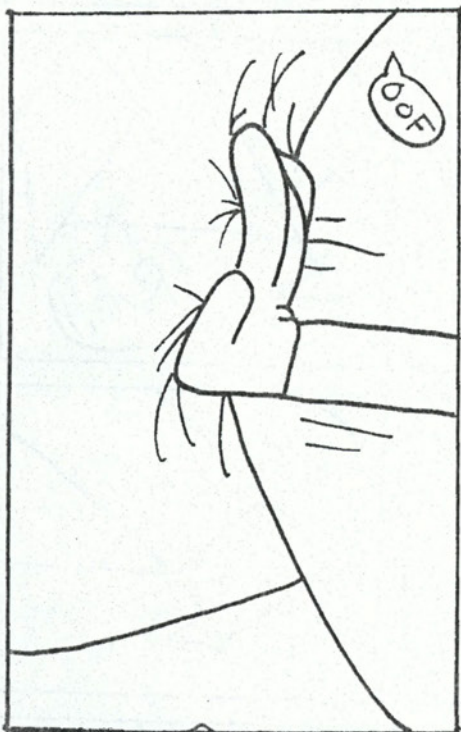
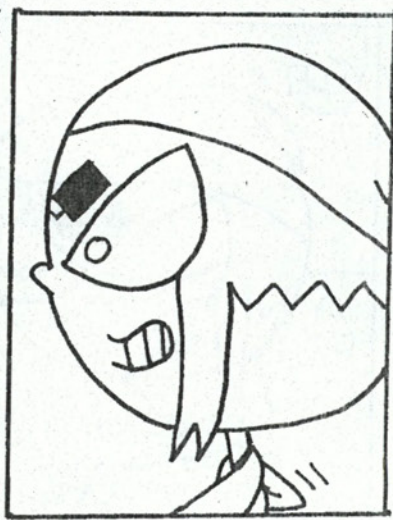


Mix! I know you have no reason to trust me... But I'm telling the truth! Fighting won't help! You need to find a way to deal with your shadow!

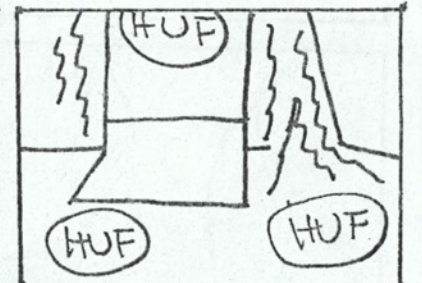
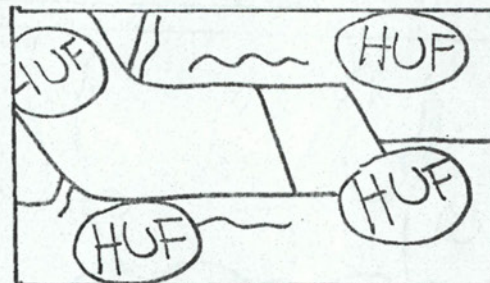
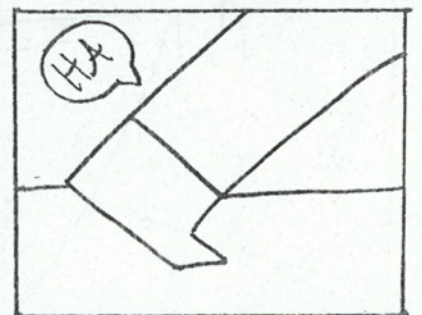
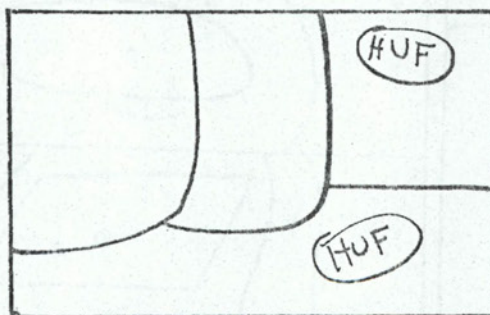
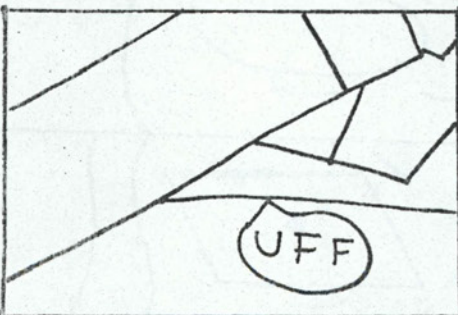
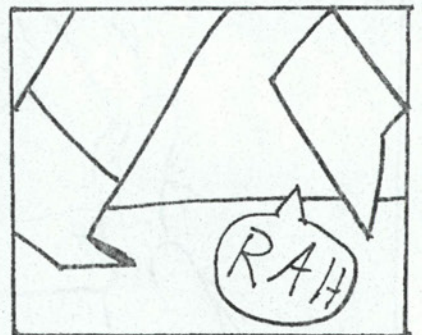
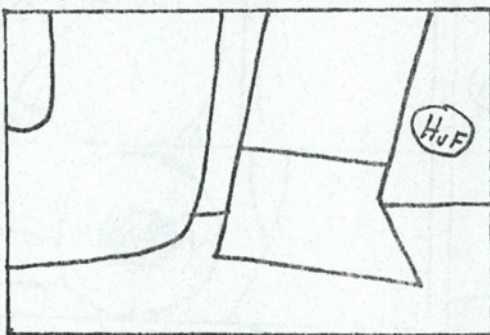
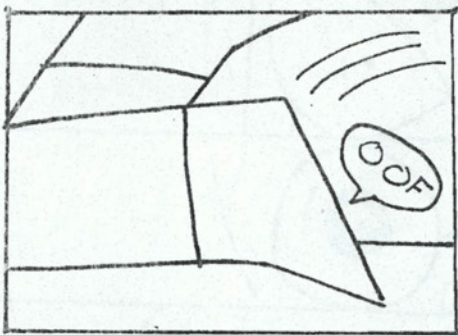
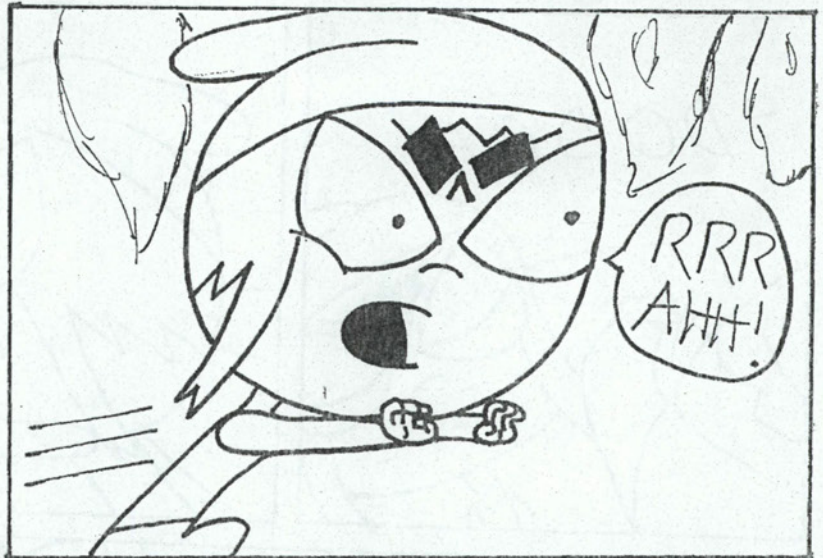








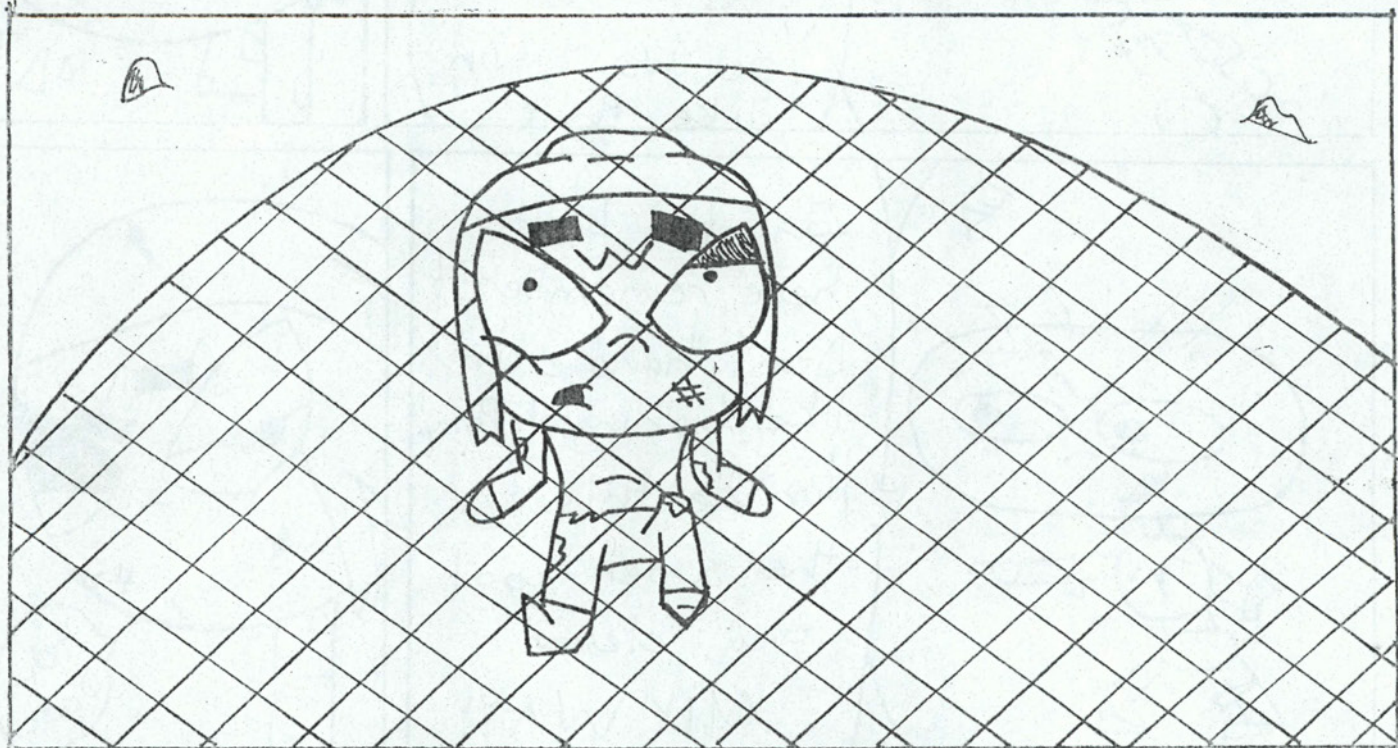
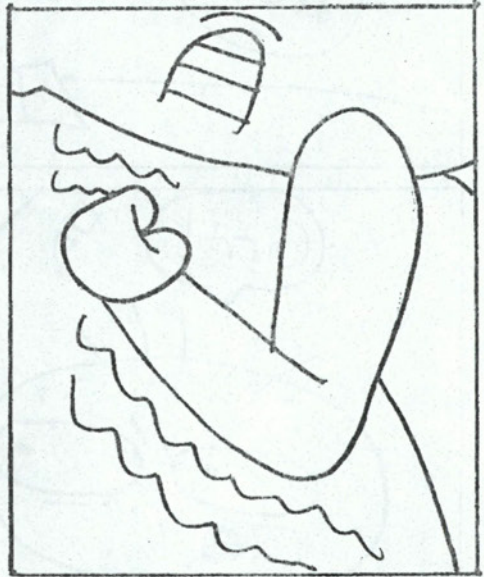
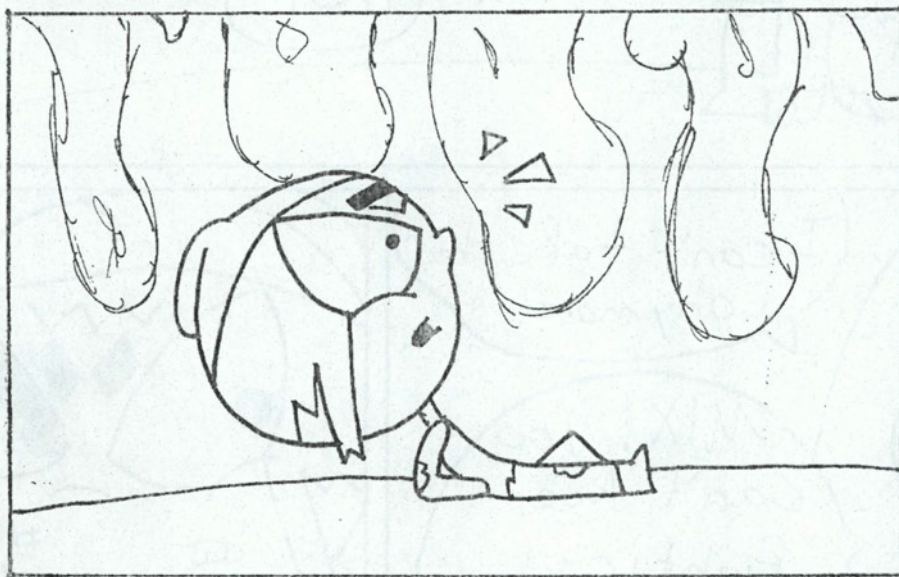
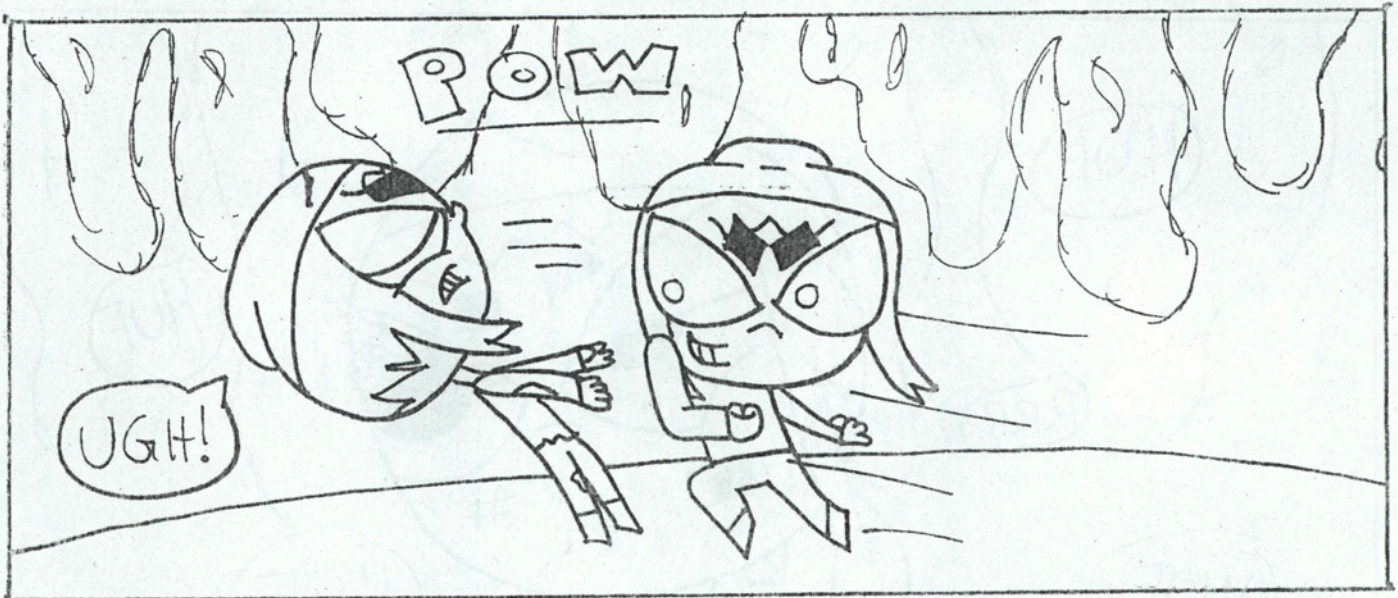




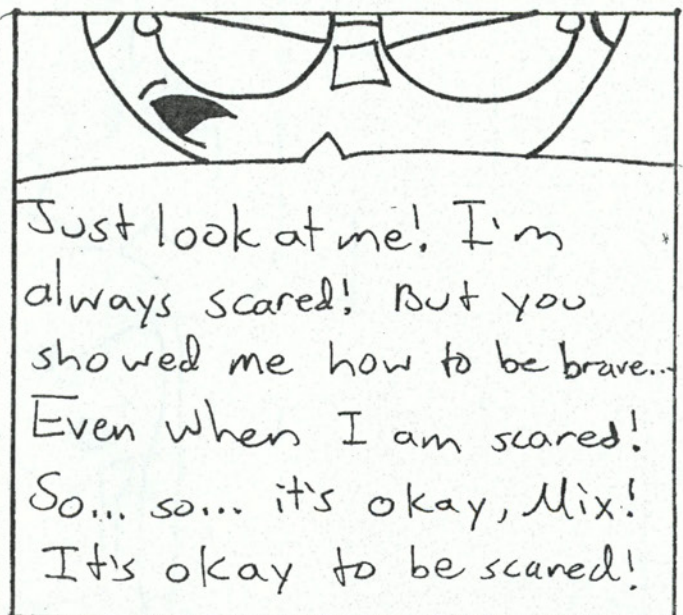
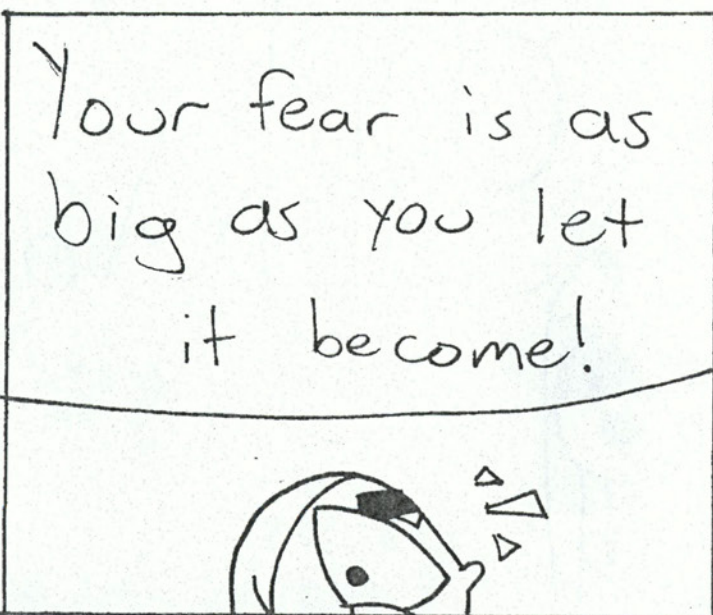
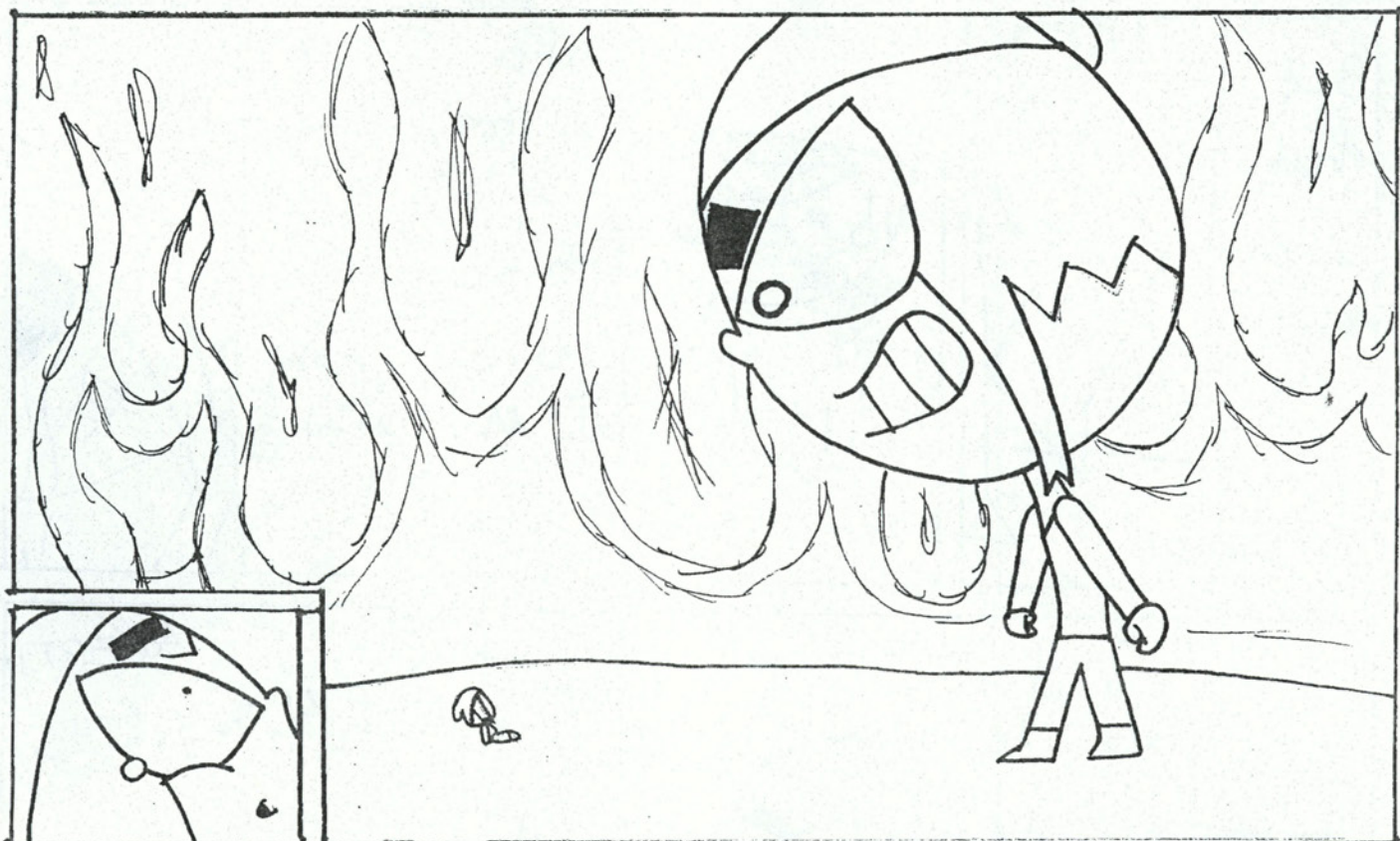










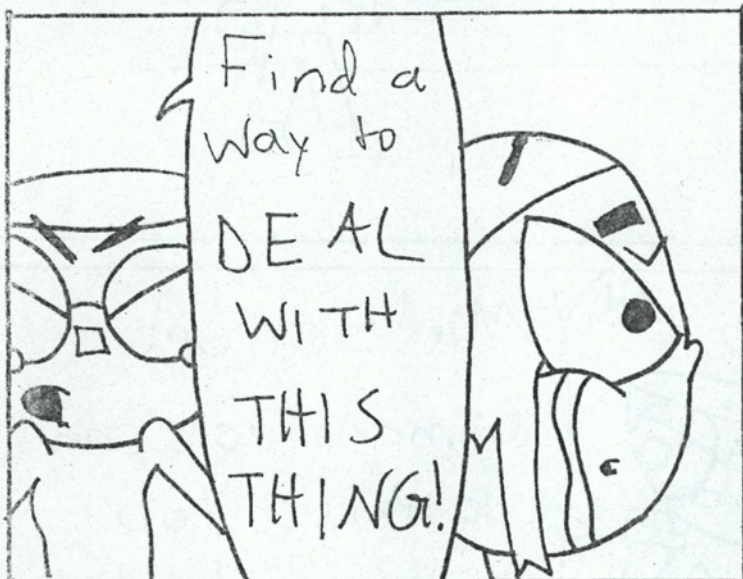




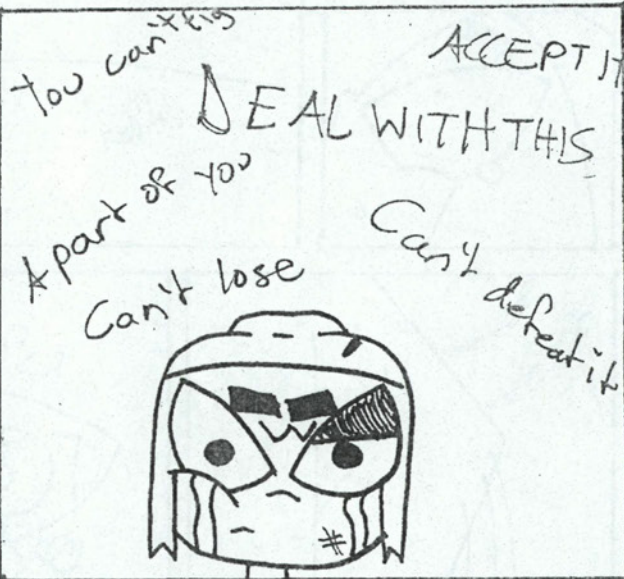
But  
that  
doesn't  
mean  
you  
stop  
trying!



When I got  
scared, YOU  
pushed me  
to keep going!  
So now... now  
I'm pushing  
YOU!



Find a  
way to  
DEAL  
WITH  
THIS  
THING!



ACCEPT IT  
DEAL WITH THIS  
You can't  
lose  
Can't defeat it  
A part of you

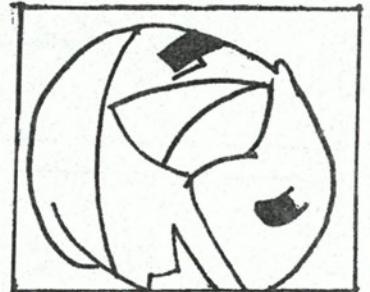
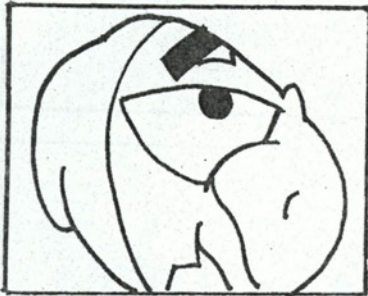
It's OK.







Y'know, Icky  
You're right.



Sometimes  
You do need  
to push  
yourself.  
But in  
times like  
these...

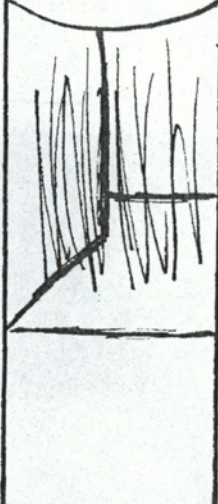


Well, I  
can't win.  
Fighting is  
no use. So  
I have to  
lose...

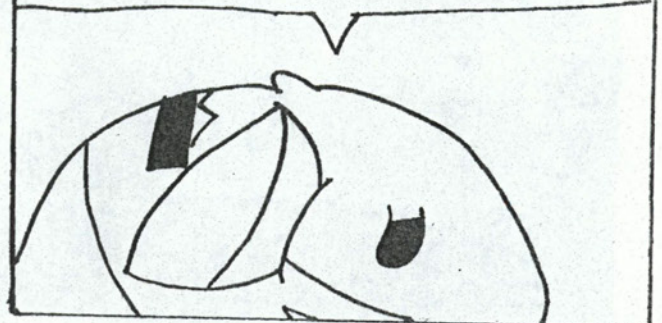
And that's okay!  
It's impossible to  
be perfect... But  
losing doesn't  
mean I'm any less!



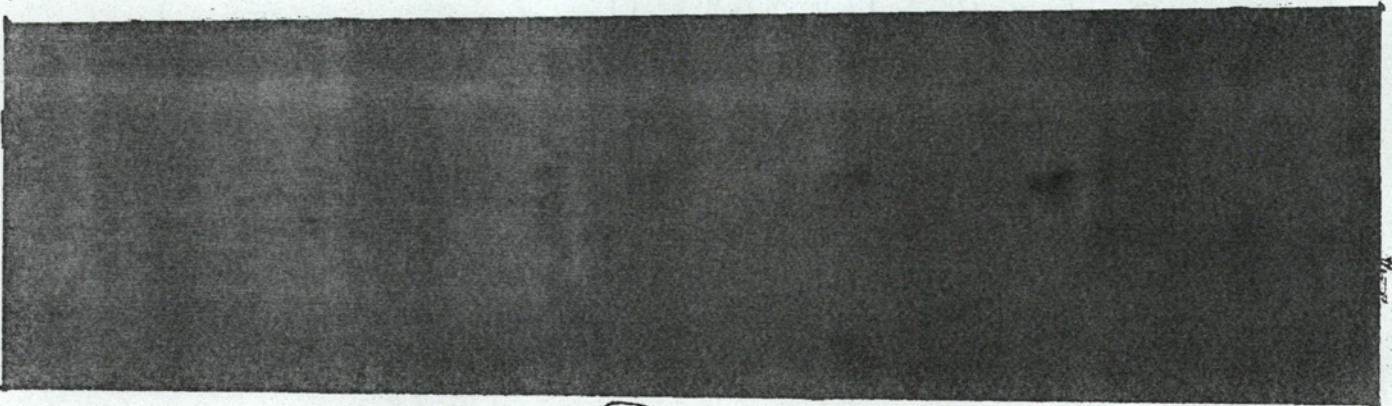
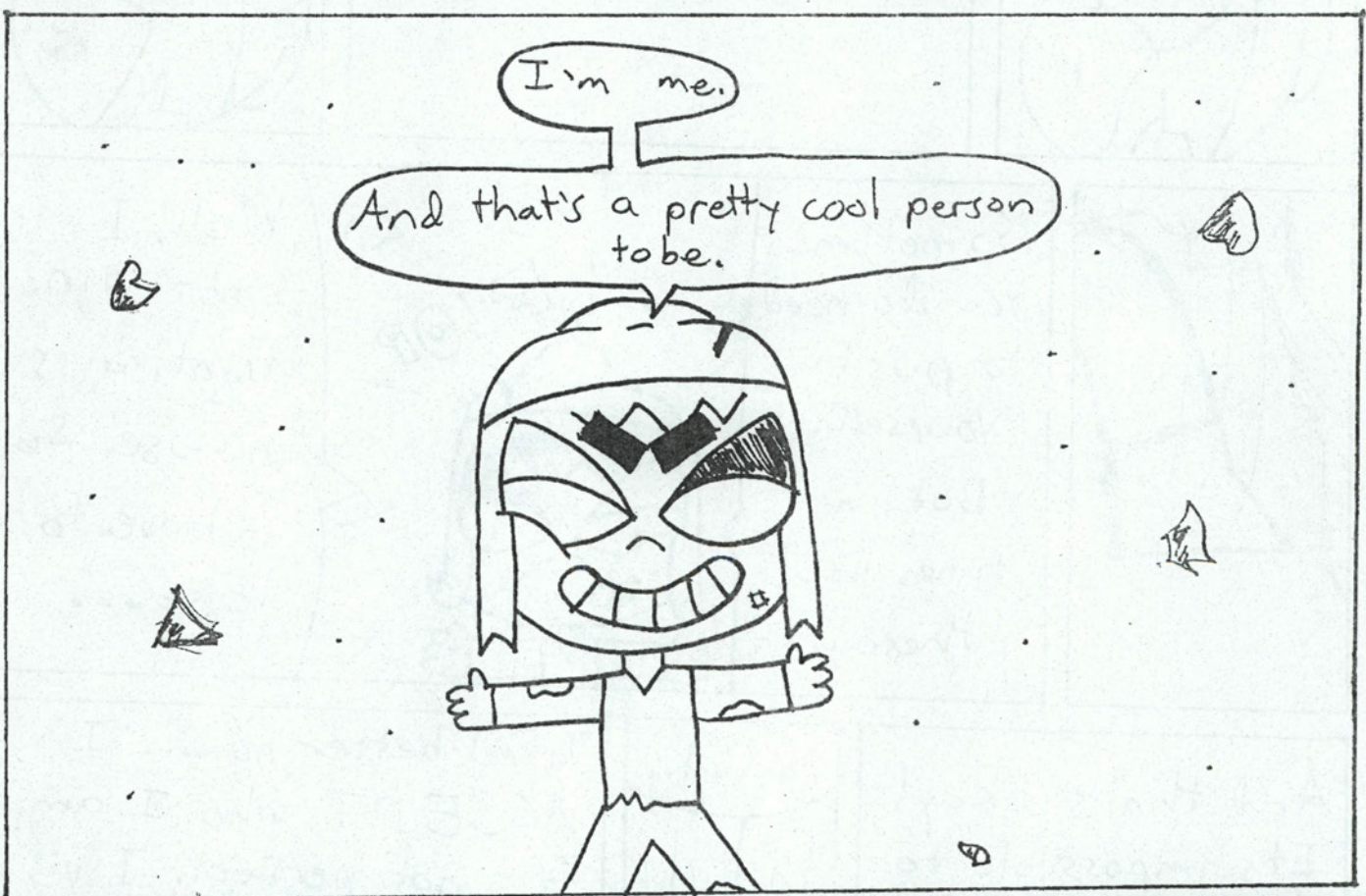
In fact...



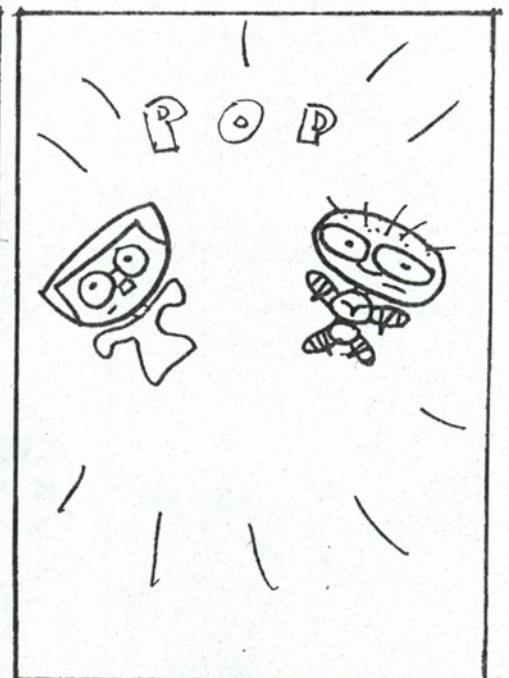
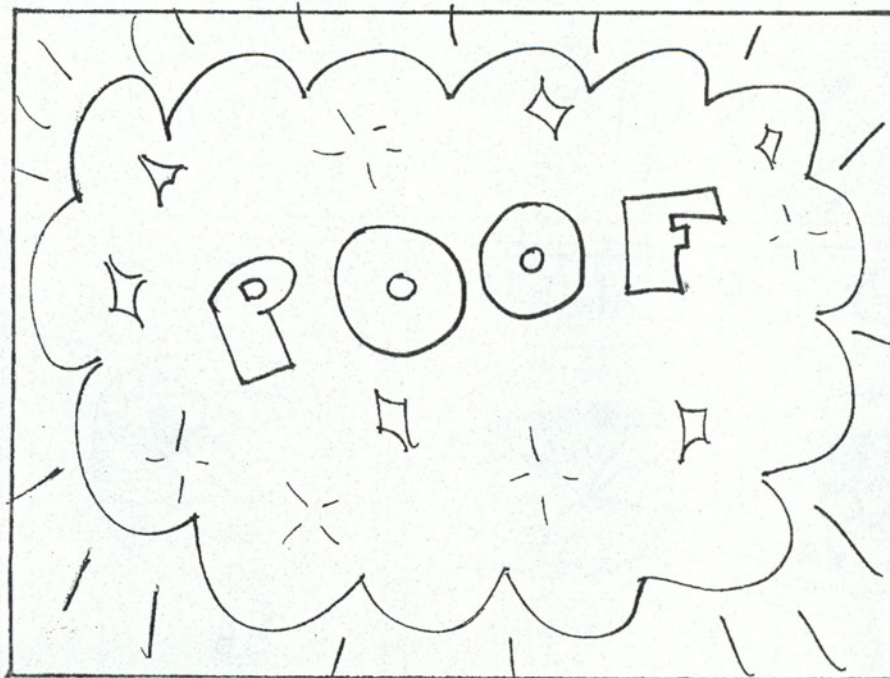
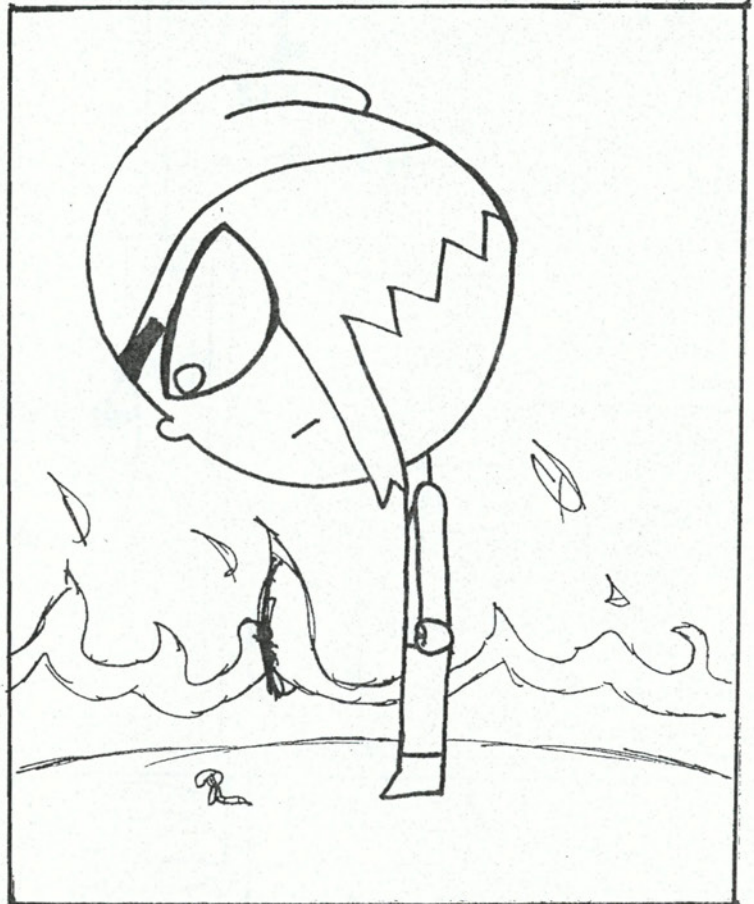
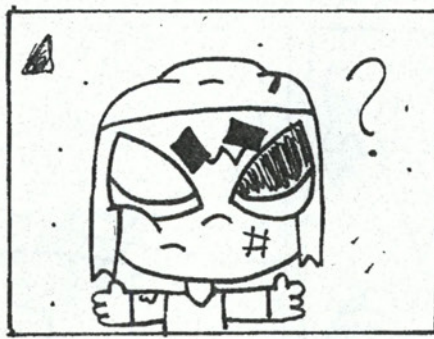
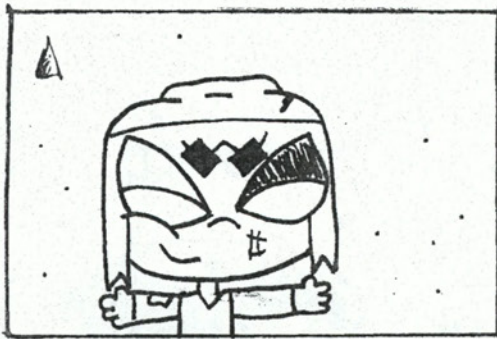
I feel better now... I  
ACCEPT who I am.  
I'm not perfect. I've  
messed up. I've lost.



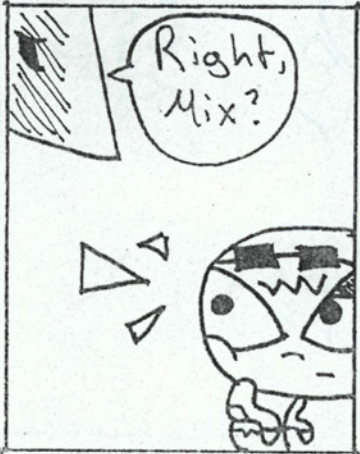
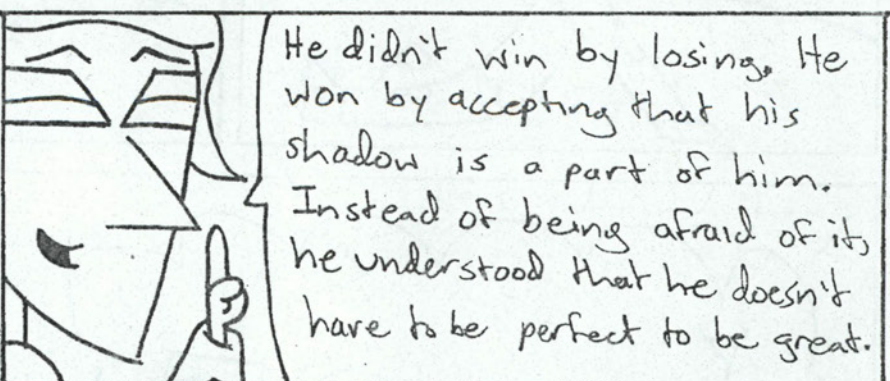
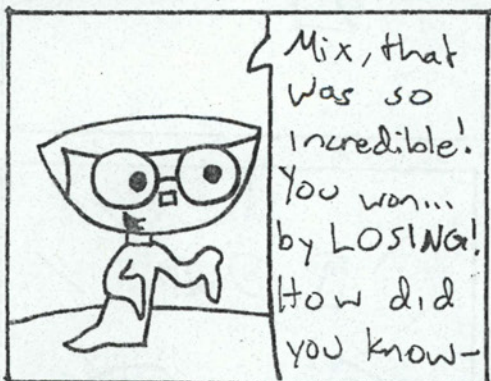
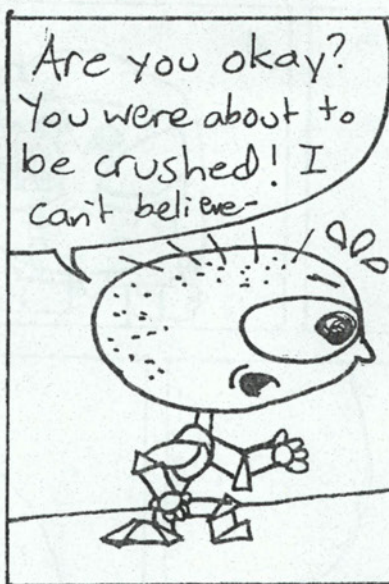




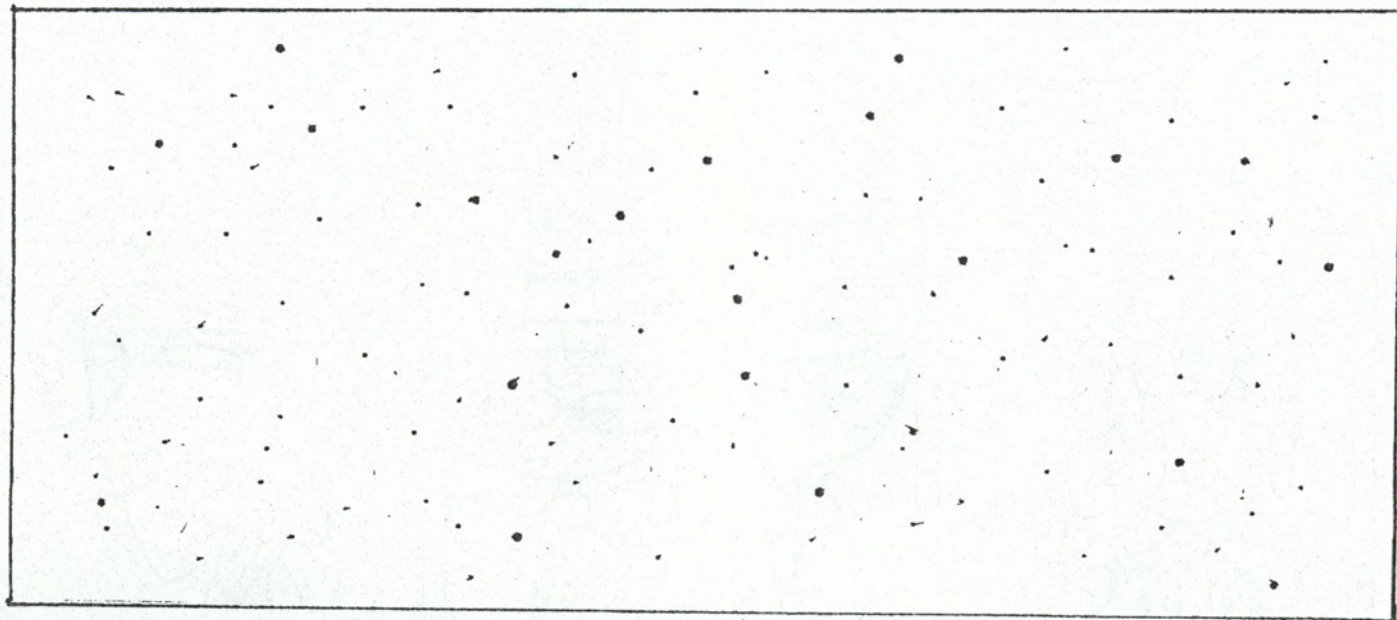
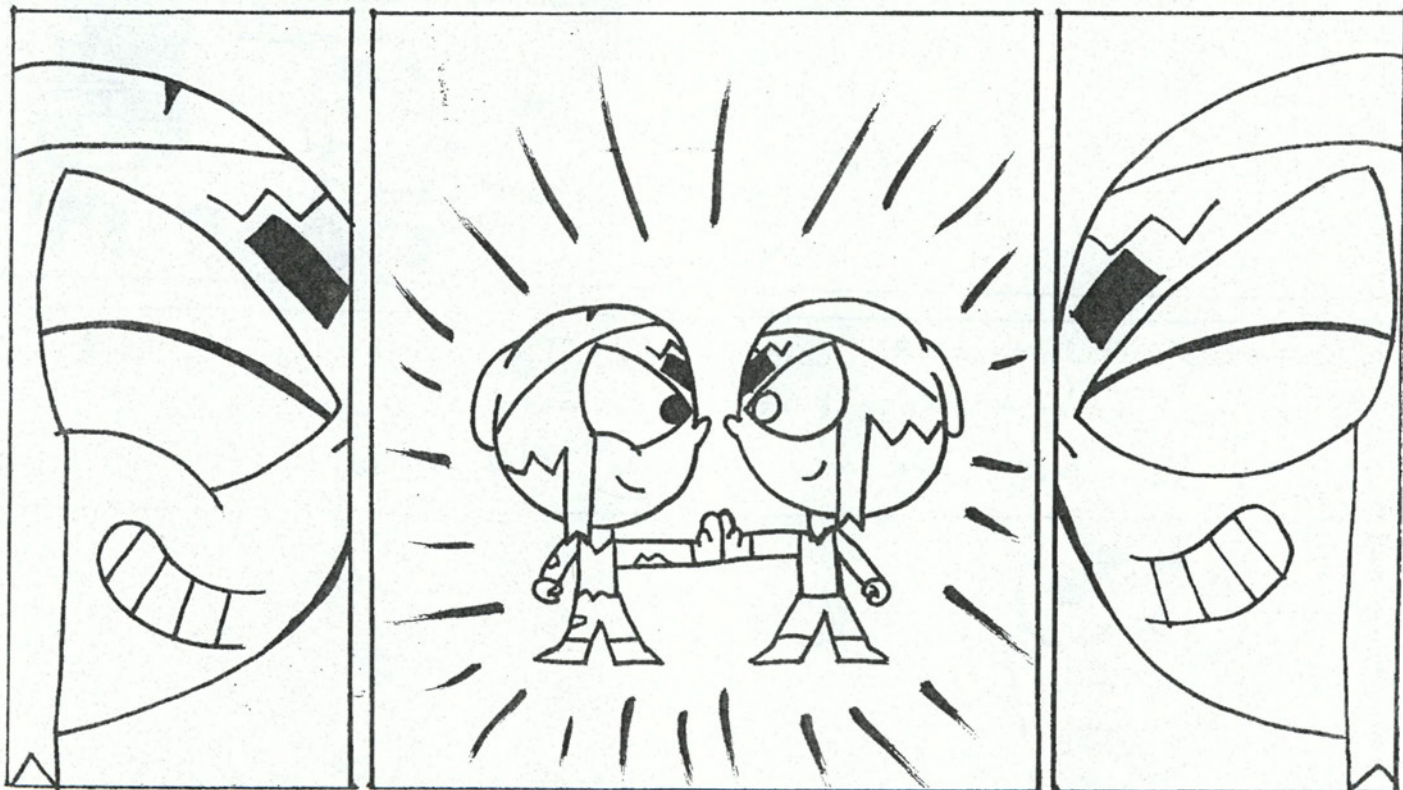
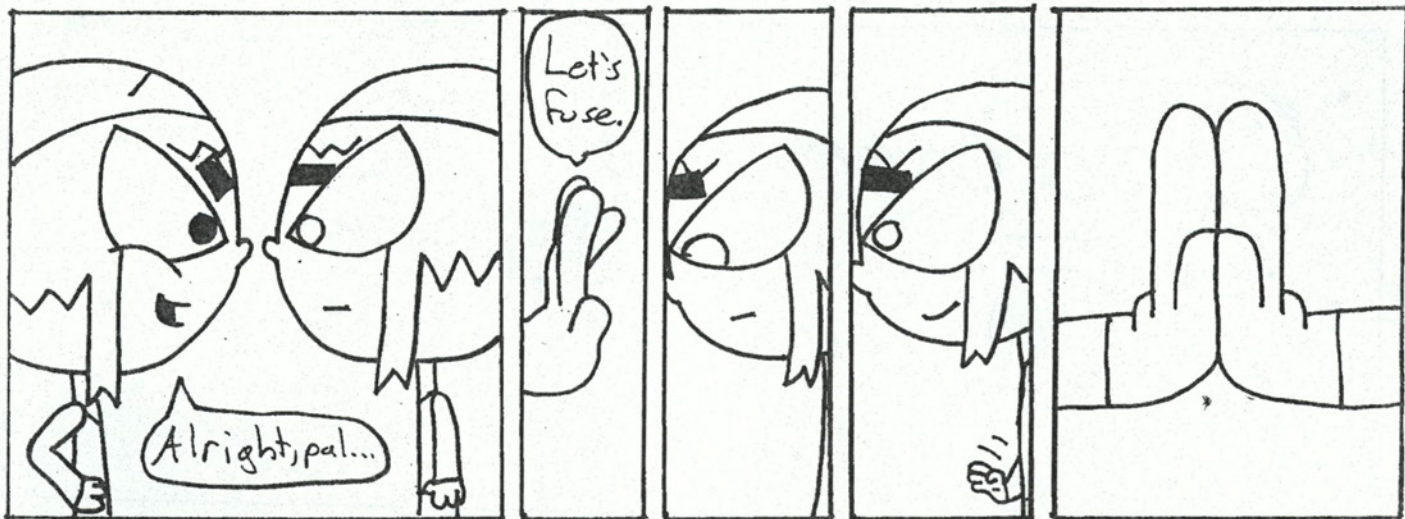














# Chapter 5



## Reality

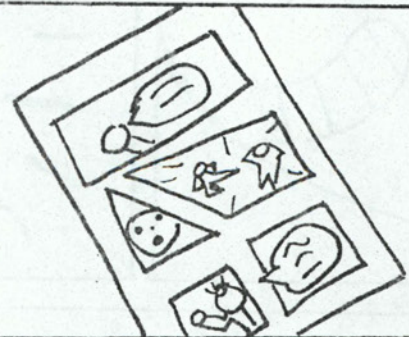


I guess it's time to come clean. This isn't really a kingdom. I'm not really an adventurer! I'm actually just a kid in school. So what were you reading? My comics, of course!



Me

My Comics



My dad? Well, he's not a king. He's actually the school principal!



Percy and Icky? They are really my friends! They can't use real magic... But let's hold off on that.



And the Dark Master? He's actually a Speech-Language Pathologist!





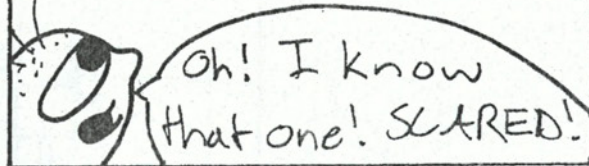
I don't really know what that is... We call him "Speech Teacher."



We have "communication disorders." So, y'know how most people can listen, read, or talk normally? Well, it's a little harder for people like us.

okay, kids! First, we're going to work on facial expressions!

It doesn't mean we can't do those things. We just need people like our Speech Teacher to help us ~~do~~ them better. Look at Percy! He has mild Autism. Sometimes, he can't tell how someone is feeling by looking at their facial expressions.



Percy really loves Flowers, but because of his Autism, he sometimes doesn't know when to stop talking about his favorite Flowers!



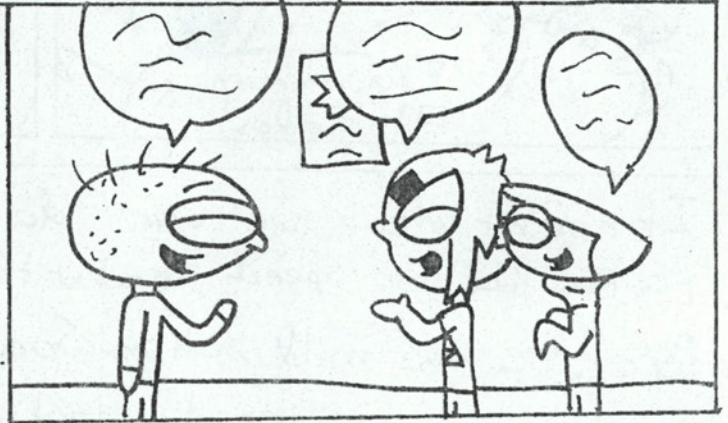
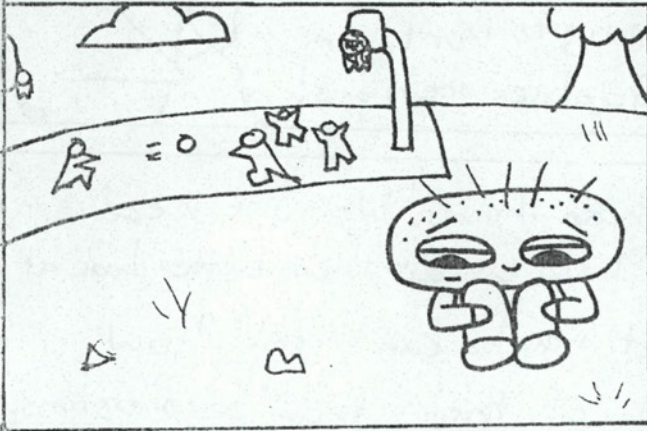
Percy, we all know you love Flowers, so why don't you ask Mix what he likes?

Oh... yeah! Mix, what do you like to do for fun?

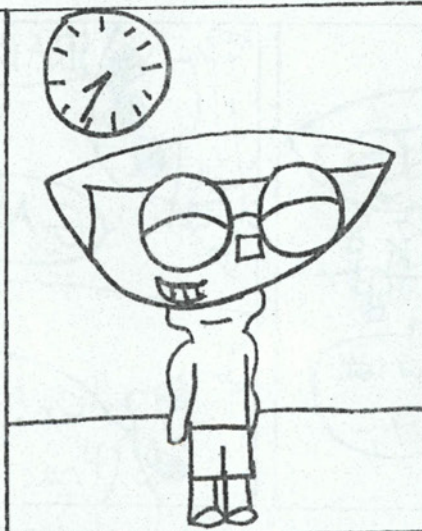




Percy used to feel bad about his Autism. He had trouble making friends because people thought he was being mean. But he's really nice! We used to fight, but since he's working with our Speech Teacher, he's gotten better at understanding how I feel. And I'm learning more about Percy's Autism!



Icky? Well there's actually nothing wrong with Icky. He just saw past our disorders and really wanted to be friends with us!



He just moved here recently, and he was pretty scared. But we became Fast Friends! He helps out our Speech Teacher.

What are we doing next?



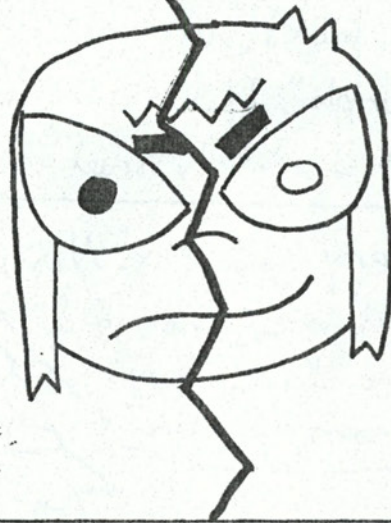
I know what you're thinking. "What about the shadow?" Well, that's me! Sort of... I have this thing called "specific language impairment," or "SLI" for short. My Speech Teacher says no one really knows what causes SLI, and that it's different for everyone that has it.





My SLI is my shadow.

Me  
(normal)



My shadow  
(bad feelings about  
having SLI)

Well, actually, my  
shadow was me  
ignoring my SLI.

Next, we're  
going to  
work on  
our reading!



I know, it's a little confusing.  
I tried to ignore and get rid of my  
SLI, but it's not something you get rid  
of. That's why I had to accept my  
shadow - I was really accepting my  
SLI! My Speech Teacher wasn't the  
bad guy, he was trying to help  
me understand that it's okay to  
have disorders like SLI. I just need  
a little extra help sometimes!

Like I said, SLI looks  
different for everyone.  
For me, reading is really  
hard. Most people read  
fine, though. So, in my  
story, magic was  
reading. That's why  
everyone else could  
use magic, but I  
couldn't.

UGH



Don't worry,  
Mix! We'll  
help you out!



Yeah!





In real life, it means I have "decoding" issues. Basically, when I try to read, everything just looks jumbled! "For" becomes "From" and "people" becomes "purple." It's so much work un-jumbling the words that I totally forget what I read!



I also have some issues when I speak. I don't actually sound like my writing - my Speech Teacher and Dad helped me write all of this! When I speak, I have trouble with "morphology" and "syntax."

My Speech Teacher said "morphology" is using the right endings on words, like in the top picture. "Syntax" means putting words in the right order in sentences, like in the bottom picture. In my story, Dad understood me because he's used to my speech, but Icky wasn't - that's why he was confused!





Speaking of Dad... I used to feel bad about my SLI. I felt dumb because everyone else could read really well, like Percy and Icky, but I just couldn't. When I spoke, no one besides my family understood me. I'm really smart! But since I couldn't speak normally, everyone just thought I was stupid. It made me so mad! I thought Dad could never be proud of me. But then he said...



Having a Communication Disorder is hard. But it's a lot easier when you have support! Dad, Icky, Percy, and even my Speech Teacher help me everyday. They help me remember that my SLI does not mean I'm stupid. It means I learn a little differently from everyone else! I've just started on my journey to handle my SLI, but with friends like mine...



I think it'll be a good one.

